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THE SUPERMAN IN THE STREET

BY

SIDNEY DARK

FOLCROFT LIBRARY EDITIONS / 1974

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LONDON
LEONARD PARSONS
DEVONSHIRE STREET

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First Published 1922

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Leonard Parsons, Ltd.

THE OUTLINE OF H. G. WELLS

CHAPTER ONE

A SHORT, stocky man with a scrubby moustache and a high-pitched voice; a man nearer sixty than fifty, but looking considerably younger; a man whose like you can see a thousand times a day in every city street. Such, superficially, is H. G. Wells whom Anatole France has recently described—and accurately described—as the greatest intellectual force in the English-speaking world.

The weakness of most supermen is their unlikeness to their fellows, and this unlikeness is often quite as obvious physically as it is mentally and morally. You cannot meet Bernard Shaw without realising at once that he is not as other men. There is something strange and unusual about him. You guess at once that he eats differently and drinks differently, thinks differently and dreams differently from the rest of us. The aspirations of such a man, his admonitions and his doctrines, are intensely interesting, but their

importance to the world is limited by his detachment from his fellows.

Intellectually, of course, H. G. Wells is immensely superior to the common rut of men. He is a born leader and inspirer of men, but—this is the point of outstanding importance — he remains a man of like passions with ourselves. Shaw and most of the intellectuals belong to a class apart. They generally recognise their separation from the rut, and glory in it. The intellectual habitually stands at the street corners and thanks God that he is not as other men. The glory of Bunyan and Charles Dickens is that they stood at the street corners and thanked God that they were as other men. Wells has many affinities with Dickens. He does not possess Dickens's glorious humour. He has never been able to realise that even in mean streets life may have its thrills. But he belongs essentially, as Dickens belonged, to the English lower middle class. He is an articulate man of the people. This is the fact that gives him his peculiar importance in the modern world.

Arnold Bennett springs from the same class. But there is a vast spiritual difference between the two men. Bennett writes with composure. Wells writes with enthusiasm. Bennett is a critic. Wells is a crusader.

Bennett is a conscious literary artist who has been vastly influenced by the great French masters. Wells uses his pen to "bash away at the minxes." His genius compels the world to listen to him, and the world listens the more attentively because his is not the voice of a visitor from Mars, but of a superman in the street.

H. G. Wells was born in 1866. He has himself written the story of his early years.

I was born in that queer indefinite class that we call in England the middle class. I am not a bit aristocratic: I do not know any of my ancestors beyond my grandparents, and about them I do not know very much, because I am the youngest son of my father and mother, and their parents were all dead before I was born.

My mother was the daughter of an innkeeper at a place named Midhurst, who supplied post-horses to the coaches before the railways came; my father was the son of the head gardener of Lord de Lisle at Penshurst Castle, in Kent. They had various changes of fortune and position; for most of his life my father kept a little shop in a suburb of London, and eked out his resources by playing a game called cricket, which is not only a pastime but a show which people will pay to see, and which, therefore, affords a living for professional players. His shop was unsuccessful; and my mother, who had once been a lady's maid, became, when I was twelve years old, housekeeper in a large country house.

I, too, was destined to be a shopkeeper. I left school at thirteen for that purpose. I was apprenticed first to a chemist, and, that proving

unsatisfactory, to a draper. But after a year or so it became evident to me that the facilities for higher education that were and still are constantly increasing in England offered me better chances in life than a shop and comparative illiteracy could do; and so I struggled for and got various grants and scholarships that enabled me to study and to take a degree in science and some mediocre honours in the new and now great and growing University of London.

After I had graduated I taught biology for two or three years and then became a journalist, partly because it is a more remunerative profession in England than teaching, but partly also because I had always taken the keenest interest in writing English. Some little kink in my mind had always made the writing of prose very interesting to me.

I began first to write literary articles, criticisms, and so forth, and presently short imaginative stories in which I made use of the teeming suggestion of modern science. There is a considerable demand for this sort of fiction in Great Britain and America, and my first book, *The Time Machine*, published in 1895, attracted considerable attention, and with two of its successors, *The War of the Worlds* and *The Invisible Man*, gave me a sufficient popularity to enable me to devote myself exclusively, and with a certain sense of security, to purely literary work.

This is a strikingly candid autobiography. To it there is little to be added except that, at the beginning of his literary career, Wells was one of the many distinguished young writers who received priceless help and encouragement from William Ernest Henley.

Despite the war and despite democratic progress, " gentlemanliness " remains one of England's curses. The traditional manners, prejudices, and habits of the well-to-do, carefully cultivated at the great universities, still dominate English life. The Englishman who is not a gentleman is heavily handicapped in whatever vocation he may choose. Consequently, everybody who is eager for position, and everybody who has something to say and wants Englishmen to listen to him, carefully cultivates gentlemanliness if he has not been lucky enough to inherit it. The most gentlemanly men in England are the leaders of the Labour Party in the House of Commons. Socialists save their money to send their sons to a " good " public school and afterwards to Oxford. One of the leaders of the Communist Party in England is a most gentlemanly gentleman.

Thackeray is the typical gentleman in literature. He was so gentlemanly that he deplored his possession of literary genius and continually regretted that he did not belong to a really gentlemanly profession. Dickens was never a gentleman in the true " gentlemanly " sense. Nor is Wells.

So widespread is the worship of gentility that I half fear Wells may regard this statement as an insult. It is intended as a

compliment. He is too unrestrained, too individual, too fearlessly candid to fit into the gentleman pattern. Wells admires many of the aristocratic virtues, particularly courage, but he invariably endows common persons with these virtues. To me, there is nothing more heartening in contemporary life than that the son of a professional cricketer should be acclaimed the greatest intellectual force in the English-speaking world at the same time as the son of a Welsh peasant is compelling great English lords and commercial magnates to dance to his pipe.

Fiction is often the creator of fact. The novelist who is of any real account is first of all the recorder of the spiritual drama of contemporary life. But while he is recording the present he may be inspiring the future. In his study of Ibsen and the Ibsen dramas, Janko Lavrin says :—

> Art is a symbolical diary of mankind's inner evolution. The history of art is the history of mankind's soul. For each epoch bequeaths its soul to future generations mainly through its art. An artistic creator is thus the best witness to his own time. He is highly contemporary, in so far as the soul of his time finds in him its most intense, its synthetic expression. But the more he feels the secret pulse of his era the greater is the burden he has to sustain—since everyone who is profoundly sensitive to his own epoch is for this very reason

spiritually also in advance of it, and, therefore, usually suffers from it, judges it, and, in some way or other, reacts against it. Hence, the importance of an artist's individual attitude towards the vital values of his epoch.

That is to say, the man whose sensitive imagination enables him to have a deep knowledge of the life of his own day is necessarily the man who is shaping the life of the days that will follow. The artist (particularly the literary artist) has affected the history of mankind (and the history of mankind has precious little to do with the exploits of Kings and Parliaments) far more than the statesman and the soldier.

Sometimes the influence is very subtle and is exercised without any intention on the part of the artist himself. Ibsen, for example, not only revolutionised the European theatre but had an immense effect on the development of European thought. But Ibsen always protested that he was nothing but an artist, and was vehemently rude to the Norwegian ladies who proposed to erect a statue in his honour as an acknowledgment of his services to the feminist cause.

Wells is a very different man. He has a genius for story telling, but his novels have two very obvious purposes. The first purpose is to demonstrate some futility, some

inane wastefulness, some unnecessary limitation of happiness and development consequent on the conventions, the customs, and the laws of contemporary life. Each of his considerable novels is a crusade, a demonstration of wicked folly at which both the humanist and the scientist in Wells equally revolt.

But the Wells novels are more than the bashings of a crusader. They are chapters in an elaborate intellectual and spiritual autobiography. It is an accepted fact that Bernard Shaw is the hero, when he is not the heroine, of every one of his plays. Wells cannot be directly identified with his characters as Shaw can be, except with Mr Britling, but in most of his novels the leading character represents a phase of the author's development.

The difference between the two men is that Shaw is always the same Shaw. The Shavian attitude to life has remained consistent. The philosophy of *Widowers' Houses* is practically the same as the philosophy of *Heartbreak House*. The joy of Wells is that he is never the same. Each day brings for him some new adventure and some new discovery.

His intellectual honesty is unqualified. When he has once abandoned a creed he will demonstrate its futility with an enthusiasm

equal to that with which he defended it. His instinct for truth is so great that at its call he has never hesitated to sacrifice the himself of yesterday. Isaac Wells is always offering Abraham Wells as a sacrifice to the Gods.

Mr H. L. Mencken protests in his characteristic caustic fashion that Wells the crusader has destroyed Wells the literary artist, and that the man as artist is now extinct " after a process of gradual obscure decay." I agree with Mr Mencken that Wells has shown himself " the most brilliant if not always the most profound of contemporary English novelists," but he has never been a conscious literary artist. He said, himself, in a letter to Henry James : " To you literature like painting is an end, to me literature like architecture is a means, it has a use."

The use that Wells has made of literature is to demonstrate the unscientific futilities of modern life. Sometimes he has employed autobiographical novels as his means of demonstration. He was impelled to the novel, as he has confessed, by the fact that novel writing is a financially profitable employment, by the fact that the novel provides him with a far larger audience than the tract, by the fact that he has a genius for story telling, and by the fact that he finds immense

pleasure in writing about himself. Sometimes he has used the essay. Recently in that marvellous achievement *The Outline of History* he has used historical narrative. But whatever means he has employed, the deliberate end has always been the same. Wells is a man with a mission.

Mr Mencken says that Wells " suffers from a messianic delusion, and once a man begins to suffer from a messianic delusion his days as a serious artist are ended." But Mr Mencken is also suffering from a delusion in supposing that Wells first put on the messianic robe in 1912. He was wearing it ostentatiously fifteen years earlier. His own declaration of the function of the novelist is the sufficient proof that, as he suggested to Henry James, to him art means " every conscious human activity." He has never in his life sat down to write a novel with the ambition that has influenced men like Henry James, George Moore, Joseph Conrad, or Flaubert.

He has written about life. He has created dozens of actual characters. He has exhibited his own personality under various fascinating guises, but he has rarely been interested in the drama that occurs from the crash of personalities, or really interested, as Joseph Conrad is always interested, in

the dramatic struggle of the individual with the eternal forces of the world. Wells is interested in the fight of the individual against the conditions of modern society. This peculiar interest is evidenced in his declaration of the subjects with which a novelist may rightly deal.

> We are going to write subject only to our own limitations about the whole of human life. We are going to deal with political questions and social questions. We cannot present people unless we have this free hand, this unrestricted field. What is the good of telling stories about people's lives if one may not deal freely with the religious beliefs and organisations that have controlled or failed to control them ?
>
> What is the good of pretending to write about love and the loyalties and treacheries and quarrels of men and women if one must not glance at those varieties of physical temperament and organic quality, those deeply passionate needs and distresses from which half the storms of human life are brewed ? We are going to write about it all. We are going to write about business and finance and politics and precedents and pretentiousness and decorum and indecorum until a thousand pretences and ten thousand impostors shrivel in the cold, clear air of our elucidations.

Here there is no nonsense about art for art's sake. Here there is a clear assertion that the novelist has a mission. Here there is a definite separation from the mere artist. Here, too, there is a significant confession.

It is business and social prejudice and politics and particularly machinery with which Mr Wells is interested and not the minute study of the hopeless struggles of men with life and with themselves that has absorbed the interest of most of the world's great poets and novelists. In *Kipps* and *The History of Mr Polly* it is the soul of man struggling against the petty stupidities of English retail shops. In *Tono Bungay* it is the soul of man struggling against the dishonest stupidity of a commercial system built on grotesque advertising. In *Anne Veronica* it is the soul of man struggling against the stupidity of the family. Always the individual is in the meshes not of fate but of folly.

In these introductory pages I am endeavouring definitely to "place" the man about whom I am writing. I am endeavouring in broad generalisations, which I shall subsequently develop, to answer the question, "Whom went ye out for to see?" The answer is—a crusader, a fierce critic of his own generation, a man with a mission, a preacher with a gospel which he has arrived at after many experiments and after embracing and abandoning many creeds. The answer, too, is a man with a vehement personality, with amazing courage, with a comprehensive understanding of contem-

porary life, with such a genius for expression and such red-hot purpose that the placid Henry James was moved to write to him : " You stand out intensely vivid and alone, making nobody else signify at all."

He is, as I have said, superficially undistinguished in appearance, but this want of distinction disappears immediately one begins to talk to him. His whole being quivers with energy. His grasp on life is amazingly comprehensive. His criticisms, his denunciations, his theories, are all his own, and are heaped up in an inexhaustible intellectual storehouse. Wells is always " keen." Whatever he does, he does with all his might. At his pleasant country house in Essex he plays hockey and other games (some of which he has invented for himself) with exactly the same zest as he has in attacking folly and preaching the way of salvation. Like all humanists (or nearly all), Wells has humour —humour enough anyway to realise that he is not always right. His humour finds expression in the odd little pen-and-ink drawings that he gives to his friends (the public can find specimens in *Boon*), and in the pretty lines he writes in the copies of his books that he gives away. He is a man with many detractors and many friends—and among his friends are more women than men.

My friend, E. T. Raymond, the author of *Uncensored Celebrities*, says of Wells :—

Both by temperament and by conviction, Mr H. G. Wells is a good hater ; a fairly complete philosophy of hatred as a useful element in life could, indeed, be distilled from his works. Mr Wells has been described as the sworn foe of Things as They Are. But not less remarkable is his detestation of Things as They Were. Things and men—for he has the rather rare capacity (Macaulay had it also in a lesser degree) of hating fiercely—as if they still lived next door—people whose dust has for ages mingled with the soil of far-distant lands.

In the matter of Mr Wells's animosities a thousand years are but as a day. He hates Constantine. He hates Cæsar and most of the Romans. He hates Alexander. He detests Demosthenes as he might "Pertinax" to-day or Count Westarp the day before yesterday. The only "old 'uns" (to quote Mr Durdles) to whom he is any way partial are a few rather vague Chinamen and Indians. But chiefly he loathes a certain kind of early-Christian Father, represented by that "little, red-haired, busy, wirepulling" person whom the church honours as Saint Athanasius.

My purpose in this book is to summarise Wells's message to his own generation and to discover the actual man from the books that he has written. I do not profess that this second task is very difficult. In that masterly book, *The Man Shakespeare*, Mr Frank Harris succeeded in discovering Shakespeare, the most impersonal of artists, from

the Shakespeare plays. Wells is an easy discovery. He scorns to be impersonal. He is always giving himself away. Precise literary criticism is no part of my task. It is certainly true, as Ford Madox Hueffer has said, that Wells "writes without the help of any æsthetic laws." Sometimes he writes admirably well. Sometimes he writes clumsily. Wells is a volcano, and volcanoes rarely vomit out their lava according to the rules. His style horrified Henry James, who wrote of "its weakness and looseness, the utter going by the board of every self-respect of composition and expression." But Wells has so much to say that he is naturally more concerned with matter than with manner.

It is not so easy briefly to summarise the Wells philosophy owing to the habitual development of mind and to a certain insistent waywardness which he has himself acknowledged. In the preface to the 1914 edition of *Anticipations*, he says: "An occasional turn of harshness and moments of leaping ignorance are in the blood of H. G. Wells."

On the title-page of *The New Machiavelli*, Wells quotes Professor William James's assertion that tender-minded and tough-minded people do both exist. Wells himself is certainly to be numbered with the tough-minded; but his tough-mindedness is qualified

by a measure, perhaps one should say a large measure, of sentimentality. This sentimentality is to be traced to his origin. It is the mark of the English middle class, and no one born into that class can ever quite escape from it. There are passages in almost all the Wells novels of an almost Dickensian sentimentality. Take, for example, the scene between Isabel and Remington towards the end of *The New Machiavelli*. It is a question whether the woman has the man all to herself or whether he continues a brilliantly promising political career.

"I am going to make a scene," she said, "and get this over. I am so discontented and miserable; I've got to tell you. It would come between us if I didn't. I am in love with you—with everything—with all my brains. I'll pull through all right. I'll be good, never you fear. But to-day I am crying out with all my being. This election—your going up; your going on. In these papers—you're a great big fact. It's suddenly come home to me. At the back of my mind I've always had the idea I was going to have you somehow presently for myself—I mean to have you to go long tramps with, to keep house for, to get meals for, to watch for of an evening."

And so on and so on. The speech itself is unreal and sentimental. It, at once, suggests that the man will finally give up his career in order to go long tramps with

the woman, which he actually does in the novel, but which he would certainly not do in real life. It is these lapses into English middle-class sentimentality that qualify Wells's tough-mindedness, but which at the same time have their importance in proving that he is a genuine representative of his nation and his age despite his pre-eminent intelligence and originality.

Disregarding unessentials and disregarding abandoned faiths and phases that have passed, it may be said that Wells has always insisted that the human mind is the final and culminating achievement of creation, and that by right thinking, and right thinking alone, can the world be saved. In *The Outline of History* he says :—

> The history of our race for the last few thousand years is no more than a history of the development and succession of states of mind and of acts arising from them.

To Wells, evil, suffering, sin are the consequences of stupidity and want of judgment. To think rightly is to act rightly. Utopia can only be reached along the road of common sense. Gilbert Chesterton continually insists that this is a funny world. Thomas Hardy continually deplores that this is a tragically sad world. Anatole France regards the world

as utterly, hopelessly meaningless. Wells looks out on the world and is perplexed and enraged by the stupidity that he discovers all around him.

Sometimes he has his moods of despair. Sometimes he feels that stupidity has bitten so deep into the life of man that it can never be eradicated, and that there is no real chance for the triumph of wisdom, happiness, and virtue. This mood finds expression in the striking speech put into the mouth of Kipps: "I tell you, we're in a blessed drain-pipe and we've got to crawl along it till we die." Sometimes Wells believes in the ultimate victory of common sense over conventional stupidity, as when he allows Mr Polly to escape from indigestion and a nagging wife to easy happiness with the comfortably fat landlady of the Potwell Inn. He has definitely proclaimed himself an optimist in *New Worlds for Old.*

Though the writer is neither a very strong nor a very healthy nor a very successful person, though he find much unattainable and much to regret, yet life presents itself to him more and more with every year as a spectacle of inexhaustible interest, of unfolding and intensifying beauty, and as a splendid field for high attempts and stimulating desires. Yet none the less is it a spectacle shot strangely with pain, with mysterious insufficiencies and cruelties, with pitfalls into anger and regret, with

aspects unaccountably sad. Its most exalted moments are most fraught for him with the appeal for endeavour, with the urgency of unsatisfied wants. These shadows and pains and instabilities do not, to his sense at least, darken the whole prospect; it may be indeed that they intensify its splendours to his perceptions. Yet all these evil ugly aspects of life come to him with an effect of challenge, a something not to be ignored but passionately disputed, as an imperative call for whatever effort and courage lurk in his composition. Life and the world are fine, but not as an abiding place: as an arena.

I do not think it would be possible to find in any of Wells's books a more satisfactory summary of his relations to the world. He is a first-class fighting man, and life is a good thing because it gives the first-class fighting man continual opportunity for exciting struggle and insistent battle. Wells goes out into the arena of life tremendously sure of himself, perfectly confident that, for whatever cause he may be fighting at the moment, his cause must be pre-eminently right, quite sure of victory and equally confident that he is armed with the sword of the Lord and of Gideon, and that his opponents are the children of darkness. With his head held high, and with a brilliant pennon at his lance head, he joyously rides to battle with what Henry James has called "the easy impudence of genius."

CHAPTER TWO

BEFORE beginning the discovery of Wells from the Wells novels, it will be worth while to continue the endeavour to "place" him by comparisons with some of his most conspicuous contemporaries. It is inevitable that the first comparison should be with Bernard Shaw. Both writers claim to be students of science as well as literary artists. Both men are interested in sociology and profess and call themselves Socialists. Both men love to talk about themselves, and are in a sense the chief protagonists of their novels and their plays. Both men are combative, assertive, and immensely sure of themselves.

As I have pointed out, one fundamental difference between Wells and Shaw is that while Wells is a fellow of infinite change, Shaw always remains the same Shaw. The consequence is that, while Wells is always up to date, Shaw has now become hopelessly out of date.

A literary epoch came to an end on August 4, 1914. Shaw has never contrived to get into the new epoch. He has used the war as a proof that he has always been right. Wells confesses that the war has proved that he has very often been wrong. Shaw is a philosophic Bourbon. He has learned nothing from the greatest convulsion in modern history. Wells was compelled by the war to reconsider almost every proposition that before the autumn of '14 he had accepted as true and to modify many of his pre-war opinions.

Heartbreak House, the latest of the Shaw plays to be produced in London, is an extraordinarily amusing and witty commentary on English life; but it is a commentary on a life which is dead and gone, not on the life that has been created by the war and by the industrial chaos that has followed the war.

The second distinction between Wells and Shaw is that Wells is English and Shaw is not. Shaw has always been particularly anxious to insist that he has no sort of connection with "leprechaun Ireland"—the Ireland of fairies and fantasy, the Ireland of Synge and Lady Gregory, the Ireland of Father Keegan, the poet-priest in his own *John Bull's Other Island.*

In the days when the Gaelic League was

first arousing the nationalist enthusiasm which led to the Sinn Fein movement and to the creation of the Irish Free State, most of the Irish literary men settled in England shook the dust of London off their feet and hurried to take up their residence in Dublin. Mr George Moore followed Mr W. B. Yeats across the Irish Channel, though his stay in Dublin was a short one and he was soon forced to confess that he preferred the Anglo-Saxon flesh-pots of the West End of London to the dull provincialism of the Irish capital. Shaw never made the journey. He was asked by an interviewer whether he intended to take up his residence in Dublin, and he replied: "Not while I can find a comfortable residence in St Helena."

Shaw belongs to the class, not a very large class perhaps, but a definite one, of "denationalised Irishmen," and the "denationalised Irishman" is one of the very few people who have succeeded in having no country of their own. His soul may not be dead, but he can never say: "This is my own, my native land!" All Shaw's criticisms, therefore, of social conventions and national prejudices must be considered with the fact that he has no country and no children.

Wells is definitely English, and definitely middle-class English. His is not the voice

of one crying aloud in the wilderness, but the voice of one crying aloud in a city street, amid the turmoil of a crowd made up of his own blood relations.

Further, while both Wells and Shaw appear to be equally anxious to give themselves away, Shaw has really spent his ironic genius in creating a false Shaw, as has been well said, " as legendary a person as the Flying Dutchman " ; while Wells has always told the truth about himself at the particular moment at which he was writing.

Wells, being an Englishman, is really a simple person. Shaw, being a " denationalised Irishman," is an intensely subtle person, joying in constructing an elaborate mask behind which to hide his own features.

The last essential point of difference between the two men is that Shaw is a Puritan and that Wells is the antithesis of a Puritan. The southern Englishman is rarely a Puritan. Puritanism has, alas ! from time to time been forced on him by foreigners like the Scotch, and by long-sighted persons in control of industry, who have realised that the Puritan makes the best and most efficient servant and can generally be relied on to give twenty-five shillings' worth of work for twenty shillings' worth of wages.

The love scenes in the Shaw plays are

anæmic, meaningless, almost ridiculous. Compare them with the hectic chapters in the latter part of *Anne Veronica*! Like all Puritans, Shaw shudders at physical love as something rather improper and unpleasant. With true English sentimentality, Wells insists, in *The New Machiavelli*, not altogether that the world is well lost for love but that, at the call of love, one must throw the world overboard whether one will or no. To talk to Shaw of the love that never counts the cost would be to talk to him of pernicious rubbish. But, with a far greater vision, Wells realises that this love remains the one overmastering incentive of human action.

Shaw is first and foremost a moralist. He is so complete a moralist that he lost all his sense of critical value and acclaimed that dull preacher Eugene Brieux as a great European dramatist. Wells is a humanist as Dickens was a humanist. It is this quality of humanism that has enabled him to fit into each era in which he has lived. The new circumstances find the new Wells. As Gilbert Chesterton has said, one can almost hear him grow.

I have already suggested some of the vital differences between Wells and Arnold Bennett. Bennett is an unemotional spectator of the drama of life, every detail of which he sees

with his calm cynical eyes. He stands aloof from the characters that he creates. He remains absolutely impersonal. Wells must cast himself for the chief part in every drama that he conceives. He is always his own Prince of Denmark, and without him his Hamlet would be dull, uninteresting, dead. Bennett sneers at life. Wells shouts at life. Bennett is the more careful and meticulous observer. Like Thomas Hardy, he makes his scene almost the chief protagonist of his story. The characters in *The Old Wives' Tale*, in *The Card*, in *Clayhanger*, in *These Twain*, and in *Hilda Lessways* are all the children of the pottery district of midland England, known as the Five Towns. Had they been born and had they lived anywhere else, they would have been spiritually different. Wells sets his stories, for the most part, in London and in Kent. But their scenes have no great significance. His characters are affected by social circumstances and hardly at all by the peculiar life of the localities in which they are placed.

Arnold Bennett was born in the Five Towns, but he has escaped from them as completely as Shaw has escaped from Dublin. He lived for some years in France. His art has been largely formed on French models. He looks at the life about which he writes from the

outside. He knows it intimately. He sees it completely—but he no longer belongs to it.

Wells still belongs to the rock from which he was hewn. He belongs to his class, to his nation, to his part of that nation, in all essentials, as completely as he did at the beginning of his career, and as completely as Dickens did to the end of his life.

There are certain points of resemblance between Wells and John Galsworthy. There are, indeed, points of resemblance between any two men that one cares to select—between, say, President Harding and Carpentier, between Lloyd George and Charlie Chaplin. But between the two writers there is a great and obvious gulf fixed.

Like Wells, John Galsworthy is moved by inequality and injustice and oppressed by the overmastering part played by money in the modern world. But Galsworthy is sedate, calm, judicial, eminently well-bred. He is a typical member of the English upper middle class—the class of the lawyers and the doctors and the professors, of the successful commercial men and the upper-grade servants of the State, who have all been educated at long-established public schools and either Oxford or Cambridge, and who, whether they be pleased or displeased, approving or indignant,

regard anything like excited enthusiasm as both stupid and ill-mannered.

There is not, I suppose, in the whole of modern English literature a more complete demonstration of the horror of money grubbing and money worship than the series of Galsworthy's novels that tell the story of the Forsyte family, beginning with *The Man of Property* and ending with *To Let*. The demonstration is tremendously effective because of its calmness, because of its perfect proportion, because of the absence of exaggeration, and because of the evident endeavour to set down nothing in malice. But this Forsyte Saga is a demonstration of the temperamental difference between Galsworthy and Wells. What Galsworthy does with perfect success in three long novels and a short story, Wells would do, perhaps quite as effectively, in a few furious pages.

Galsworthy has the qualities of a very fair-minded judge. He always wants to hear what can be said on both sides. Wells is always sure that there is only one side—his side—and he has no time to waste in listening to nonsense.

Galsworthy is a sympathetic observer of modern life. Nine times out of ten in any social or political controversy he and Wells would be on the same side.

When the fight begins, however, Galsworthy always feels that decency and breeding demand that his opponents shall be treated gently, as misguided persons with the very best of intentions. When the battle begins, Wells has no other idea but to hit the enemy over the head with a club. The club is well-aimed. The blow is given without any malice. The bashing away may be regarded as a nasty job. But it is a nasty job that has to be done. And it is an essential part of the Wells philosophy never to run away from nasty jobs.

No two men could be more utterly unlike (in mind and body, if not in estate) than Wells and George Moore. Some one once said of Moore : " He is wonderful, but he sets fire to nothing." Wells is an incendiary bomb. Moore is quite as interested in himself as Shaw and Wells are interested in themselves, as eager to talk about himself, as ready to narrate his own adventures—even ready, so it is said, to narrate adventures with himself as hero which have never taken place. George Moore's egoism is patronising. Bernard Shaw's egoism is critical. Wells's egoism is fraternal.

Both Shaw and George Moore (both, remember, " denationalised Irishmen ") regard themselves as entirely and magnificently

different from the rest of the world. Wells is interested in himself because he sees in himself the photograph of his fellows, a little "touched up" perhaps, as the photographers say, because of his genius, but nevertheless a photograph. He says in effect: "Kipps is Wells but for the grace of God," and "Kipps is you because fate has not intervened."

In *The Confessions of a Young Man* and his trilogy *Hail and Farewell*, Moore insists that Moore is an extraordinary, exceptional being, whom not even the High Powers of Heaven could make the rest of us resemble.

George Moore is a very great novelist, a stylist with acute observation and a power of construction learned from the French. As a literary artist, the author of *Esther Waters* is the superior of the author of *Tono Bungay*. But considering the men as servants of their age, there can be no comparison between them. George Moore's personality was wittily summarised by Susan Mitchell, who said that some men kiss and tell, some men kiss and don't tell, George Moore doesn't kiss and tells. Wells certainly kisses—and he quite conceivably tells.

The men of an epoch, the men that influence contemporary thought and contemporary life, are always the men of one

particular nation. It is true that neither art nor philosophy knows anything of national boundaries. The artist and the philosopher may carry delight and influence living from one end of the earth to the other. But they themselves must be national.

Shakespeare, Milton, Bunyan, Shelley, Thackeray, Dickens were first and foremost English. No other country but England could possibly have produced them. Molière, Voltaire, Hugo, Balzac, Dumas, Flaubert were in their several ways first and foremost French. No other country but France could possibly have produced them. Many American writers of distinction have produced work that might have been written by Englishmen. That was inevitable. But the literary art of outstanding importance produced in the short history of the United States is as vehemently American and not English as the plays of Victor Hugo are vehemently French and not English. I repeat that one of the causes of Wells's importance is that he is English from top to toe.

There is no connection whatever between emphatic nationalism and crude jingoism. A man may belong to his own country, and may never spiritually travel very far from it, without failing to realise the qualities of

other peoples and without desiring materialistic domination over them.

This nationalism in his blood gives Wells a far greater importance than belongs to Bernard Shaw and George Moore. Similarly he has a greater importance than Joseph Conrad, supreme writer as he is, since Conrad is a portent, a solitary who has left his own people while retaining many of their characteristics, and has adopted a new people and a new language without attaining any of the qualities that differentiate that people from the rest of the world.

There is splendid æsthetic pleasure to be derived from the writing of a man who has by some miracle become a supreme master of a language which was not originally his own. There is an immense interest in his philosophy and his point of view. But the philosophy and the point of view have very little application to the dreams, the disappointments, and the aspirations of other men, because Conrad's experience has been unique, and life as he sees it can only exist for himself.

Conrad is a lonely man. He has left behind so much. He has apparently found so little to take its place. His native Poland was left behind years ago. His life as a seaman—"the voices of rough men now no more, the strong voice of the everlasting winds, the

whisper of a mysterious spell "—are now "all shoved behind 'im, long ago, and far away." His own loneliness has impelled him to believe that the vital life of every individual man is the life which no man can share. The "privacy of the soul" is emphasised in almost every one of his stories. This is the note of the great Russian masters, of whom Joseph Conrad is the spiritual child. His characters stand apart. They are not unaware of "the latent feeling of fellowship with all creation." They are not really unsocial, because their creator has spent years at sea and the sailor soon learns that we are all members one of the other. But the feeling of fraternity is always struggling against the instinct for solitude, the desire of man to hide himself in himself.

Solitariness and aloofness have certainly no part in the Wells philosophy. The individual is first and always a member of society, his brother's keeper, born with an insistent and inescapable duty to destroy the folly and stupidity that exists around him. In *The World Set Free*, Wells says: "His (man's) chief activity, for a hundred centuries and more, was the subjugation of himself and others to larger and larger societies. . . . The ape in us still resents association."

An American critic has called Joseph Conrad "a historian of hearts." Wells is the historian of society, the commentator on social life, the crusader against social evils.

In his *A Personal Record*, Joseph Conrad says: "I will make bold to say that neither at sea nor ashore have I ever lost the sense of responsibility." An intense sense of responsibility is a brake on rash action. It hampers the adventurer since it fills him with a certain doubt concerning the effect of his adventure. The sea captain takes as few risks as possible. Joseph Conrad, the novelist, writes like a sea captain—enormously careful to exaggerate nothing, to say nothing that he does not know to be absolutely true, and to tell his story as perfectly as it is in him to tell it. Such a man must always have impulse well in hand. Wells is the creature of impulse. Whatever he thinks he says. Whenever an idea occurs to him he acts on it, promptly and vehemently.

It is not necessary to say much of the evident difference between Wells and Gilbert Chesterton and Hilaire Belloc. In *A Modern Utopia* Wells says: "There is no abiding thing in what we know. We change from weaker to stronger lights." In *Heretics* Chesterton says: "It is not true that every-

thing changes; the things that change are all the manifest and material things." The difference is fundamental.

Hilaire Belloc is a gifted Catholic historian, and his criticisms of *The Outline of History* will be dealt with in the chapter devoted to that book. Chesterton and Belloc are Catholics, regarding every event and every movement from the point of view of men accepting without question the traditional faith handed down by the saints. To them the Catholic Church is the one inspired, stable, illuminating, and explanatory institution on earth, the same yesterday, to-day, for ever.

To Wells this attitude of mind is appalling. To Chesterton, Wells's spiritual adventures are amusing. To Belloc, they are offensive.

Chesterton and Belloc have a philosophy which may be summed up as: "Let us eat, drink, and be merry, for, whatever may be the ills of life, we are the children of God, and therefore we have the right to rejoice." The love of beer, and wine, and home is part of their creed. I am convinced that they both believe that prohibitionists will be eternally damned.

J. C. Squire has wittily parodied Belloc in his *Tricks of the Trade*:

"So Sussex men, wherever you be,
Hey diddle, Ho diddle, Do,
I pray you sing the song with me,
Hey diddle, Ho diddle, Do;
That of all the shires she is the queen,
And they sell at the "Chequers" at Chanctonbury Green
The very best beer that ever was seen,
Hey Dominus, Domine, Dominum,
Domini, Domine, Domino!"

Wells is no Puritan or spoil sport. He may not find so much cause for rejoicing as Chesterton. He may not rejoice so loudly. But the Chesterton-Belloc drinking songs might well be sung by Mr Polly in the evening at the Potwell Inn.

I propose to conclude this series of comparisons by putting Wells alongside the two great masters of fiction of an older generation who are living when this chapter is written—Anatole France and Thomas Hardy. How does the significance of Wells appear when he is taken into the veritable Land of the Giants?

Like Wells and Shaw, Anatole France is a Socialist. Since the war, indeed, he has "rallied" to the Third International and has permitted himself to be numbered among the disciples of Lenin. But Anatole France is essentially a man without faith. He does not believe in anything very much, and I am

quite certain that he has little hope that the Gospel of Moscow will create a new heaven and a new earth.

Joseph Conrad has written of Anatole France :

> He is a great analyst of illusions. He searches and probes their innermost recesses as if they were realities made of an eternal substance. And therein consists his humanity ; this is the expression of his profound and unalterable compassion. He will flatter no tribe, no section, in the forum or in the market-place. His lucid thought is not beguiled into false pity or into the common weakness of affection. He feels that men born in ignorance as in the house of an enemy, and condemned to struggle with error and passions through endless centuries, should be spared the supreme cruelty of a hope for ever deferred. He knows that our best hopes are irrealisable ; that it is the almost incredible misfortune of mankind, but also its highest privilege, to aspire towards the impossible ; that men have never failed to defeat their highest aims by the very strength of their humanity, which can conceive the most gigantic tasks but leaves them disarmed before their irremediable littleness.

This is the philosophy of despair. You may try. Indeed, you must try, but you are quite certain to fail. No goal can ever be reached. No battle can ever be won. Life is utterly meaningless.

Anatole France is the supreme ironist. He looks out on life and he finds a sort of pained amusement, for he is essentially

humane, in the joys and sorrows, in the struggles and disappointments, of his fellows. I know no more completely ironic, I might say cruelly ironic, incident in fiction than the account of the funeral of the unfortunate comedian in Anatole France's *L'Histoire Comique*. It is all so horribly—worse still—so amusingly true.

Wells may have none of Anatole France's dignity and restraint. It may well be that he may never be counted among the princes of literature, where Anatole France sits secure. But he has certainly none of the great French writer's despair. He urges to battle with the promise of victory. The Martians may invade the earth, but the earth will destroy them. The prize may not always be as satisfying as the anticipation. When he has thrown his old career overboard and has eloped with Isabel, Remington, the hero of *The New Machiavelli*, may discover that he looks back with almost bitter regret, and there may be tears in Isabel's eyes. But something has been gained, something real, when, as Remington says : " I crossed over to her and crept closely to her and drew her wet cheek to mine."

Wells may not have Browning's robust faith in the ultimate victory of good over evil, and of wisdom over folly, but he does

believe that something worth while can always be gained, and this faith has become robuster as the years have gone on.

Thomas Hardy shares Anatole France's conception of life as long days of meaningless pain. He says of Jude: "He was the sort of man who was born to ache a good deal before the fall of the curtain upon his unnecessary life should signify that all was well with him again."

It is curious that the two greatest modern masters of the novel should share the old Puritan idea that life is necessarily painful, though, unlike the old Puritans, they promise us no heaven of delight as a compensation for the ills endured in the flesh. Mr Harold Child has said of Thomas Hardy: "Nature, love, power—he sees the sadness and insufficiency of them all. . . . Philosophically the novels taken as a whole are an expression of the belief that the world is governed by a force neither good nor evil and indifferent to man's feeling."

But Hardy is not absolutely without faith. He does not possess Anatole France's complete unbelief. Some years ago he said in a letter to me that he supposed that his poems contain "more vital matter than my other books," and *The Dynasts* is certainly the culminating achievement of his genius.

The characters of *The Dynasts* are shown as the sport of circumstances, driven hither and thither by fantastic irresponsibility, but with it all the poet sounds a definite note of hope.

> " But—a stirring thrills the air
> Like to sounds of joyance there
> That the rages
> Of the ages
> Still be cancelled, and deliverance offered
> from the darts that were,
> Consciousness the Will informing, till It
> fashion all things fair ! "

Change the word " Consciousness " into " Common Sense " and we have something like a summary of the Wells faith. It is man's ineffectual struggle against the great forces of life that is the background of the tragedy of the Hardy novels. It is man's often ineffective kicks against, not eternal forces, but futile conventions, that generally makes the drama of life as Wells sees it. It is, perhaps, because his enemy is less powerful that Wells is the more confident of victory.

CHAPTER THREE

In a letter written to me in 1901, Wells said :—

My biggest thing, my most intimate thing, my first line of battleship is *Anticipations*; my best piece of significant story writing *The Invisible Man*. I think *The Wonderful Visit* manages to be pretty, and that *Love and Mr Lewisham* is as near beauty as I am ever likely to get; and I am fond of *The War of The Worlds* because of its spirited destruction of property. I don't like *The First Men in the Moon* as a whole, but I think it contains some of the best descriptive writing I have ever done. And I have a great tenderness for *The Island of Dr Moreau* because it is the only book of mine that I think has been treated unfairly. But in places I must admit, in spite of my affection, that it is not good.

That letter was written six years after the publication of the first Wells novel. Until then, in all the books that he had written, he had made use of " the teeming suggestions of modern science."

Writing of this first period of Wells's literary career Gilbert Chesterton says :—

Mr Wells began his literary work with violent vision—vision of the last pangs of this planet. . . .

He went on to wilder and wilder stories about carving beasts into men and shooting angels like birds. . . . Since then he has done something bolder than either of these blasphemies: he has prophesied the political future of all men; prophesied it with aggressive authority and a ringing decision of detail.

This summary was written in 1905, just after the publication of *A Modern Utopia*, after the publication of *Love and Mr Lewisham* and most of the scientific romances, but before the writing of *The War in the Air*, *The World Set Free*, and *The War that Will End War*.

Wells was twenty-nine when he first began to write novels. He had had a scientific education, and he probably had a wider and better balanced knowledge of science than a great many men with strings of learned degrees. He has explained that he took to writing as a profession because it was better paid than teaching, and that he had "always taken the keenest interest in writing English."

There was another and most important factor that made him a successful fiction writer from the beginning. Wells was a scientist with an audacious imagination. The average scientist is preoccupied with facts. He is interested in things as they are. Possibly because the more a man knows the more he is impressed with the number of

things that he does not know, the average scientist is chary of prophecy, and loth to foretell the effect of new discoveries and the results of new knowledge.

But Wells, for all his scientific knowledge, was at heart an artist, a man of dreams and imagination. Whenever he heard of some new discovery, he at once began to think what its consequences might be, and to prophesy in the guise of romance. It will be interesting to note how good a prophet Wells has been. But it is first necessary for me to point out that the writing of his scientific romances, his imaginative application of modern science to the individual and collective life of men, led directly to his first essay as a sociologist, and as a consequence to his association with the Socialist movement in England.

Anticipations, " my first line of battleship," was published in 1901, and reprinted with a new introduction in 1914. In this introduction Wells says that he was laughed at thirteen years before for prophesying that " long before 2000, and probably before 1950, a successful aeroplane will have soared and come home safe and sound."

His material prophecy had been entirely justified, but he had not quite understood in 1901 the soul-killing dangers that an ap-

parently more rationally organised society might bring with it. He confesses that when he wrote *Anticipations* he had not understood " the danger of interference and paralysis " arising from the constant " nosey Parkerism " (to use a Cockney vulgarism) of bureaucrats and small efficient persons. He finishes this introduction with a summary of the faith which, as I have indicated, runs throughout all his work.

> It is not by canvassing and committees, by tricks and violence, but by the sheer power of naked reasonableness, by propaganda and open intention, by feats and devotions of the intelligence, that the great state of the future, the world-state, will come into being.

I have said that Wells is nationalistic, by which I mean that he is absolutely English in his qualities and his limitations. No doubt he is also patriotic, though this is an entirely different thing, but his patriotism in 1901 and his nationalism at the Washington Conference has not prevented him from realising that civilisation can only continue by the means of international co-operation. He says in *Anticipations* :—

> I infer that, whether violently as a revolution or quietly and slowly, this grey confusion that is democracy must pass away inevitably by its own inherent conditions, as the twilight passes, as the

embryonic confusion of the cocoon creature passes into the higher stage, into the higher organism, the world-state of the coming years.

Gilbert Chesterton has ridiculed the whole idea of the world-state.

He (Wells) says in his innocent way that Utopia must be a world-state, or else people might make war on it. It does not seem to occur to him that, for a good many of us, if it were a world-state we should still make war on it to the end of the world. For if we admit that there must be varieties in art or opinion, what sense is there in thinking there will not be varieties of government ? The fact is very simple. Unless you are going deliberately to prevent a thing being good, you cannot prevent it being worth fighting for. It is impossible to prevent a possible conflict of civilisations, because it is impossible to prevent a possible conflict between ideals. If there were no longer our modern strife between nations, there would only be a strife between Utopias. For the highest thing does not tend to union only : the highest thing tends also to differentiation. You can often get men to fight for the union ; but you can never prevent them from fighting also for the differentiation. This variety in the highest thing is the meaning of the fierce patriotism, the fierce nationalism of the great European civilisation.

This criticism is not hard to meet. Variety of government is already tending to disappear. Already all over Europe and America government is in the hands of elected persons. Presently the same system will be the rule

in Asia and Africa. Ideals, too, are becoming common to all peoples, and national differences ever grow less. Moreover—and this is the really important point,—unless war, with its ever-increasing destructiveness, is not abolished, all existing civilisations will assuredly be destroyed. Wells says: "Let us live by creating a world-state." Chesterton's answer is: "Let us die."

To return for a moment to the material prophecies, the aeroplane prophecy was a good prophecy. Another good prophecy in *Anticipations* is that a great war would speedily occur, and that when it did occur "the whole mass of the efficient in the State will have to be at work" for the State. Wells foretold the coming of the tanks, and in *When the Sleeper Wakes* the moving side-walks now being considered in Paris. But Wells was a bad prophet when he wrote: "I must confess that my imagination, in spite even of spurring, refuses to see any sort of submarine doing anything but suffocate its crew and founder at sea."

He believed that the risk of death under horrible circumstances would be so demoralising that it would be impossible to provide the submarine with an effective crew. Wells was for once unable to realise the almost infinite courage of the common man

and of his ability to fit himself into the most novel and the most uncomfortable conditions.

The last chapter of *Anticipations* is called "The Faith of the New Republic," and it is interesting to notice how far the Wells of 1900 was from the Wells of "God the Invisible King." In 1900 Wells said :—

> To men of the kinetic type belief in God so manifest as purpose is irresistible, and to all lucid minds the being of God, save as that general atmosphere of imperfectly apprehended purpose in which our individual wills operate, is incomprehensible. To cling to any belief more detailed than this, to define and limit God in order to take hold of Him, to detach oneself and parts of the universe from God in some mysterious way in order to reduce life to a dramatic antagonism, is not faith, but infirmity.

Wells's scientific mind revolts against the disorder of the world, its wastefulness, its futilities. But when he came into close personal contact with "scientific" Socialists, who wanted to reduce the picturesque and sometimes thrilling muddle of life into a likeness of a well-ordered schoolroom, where everyone should sit where he was told, and do as he was told, and think as he was told, by trained, competent, and entirely unimaginative teachers, the artist in him re-

volted. After his experiences with these people he wrote:—

> I saw what hitherto I had merely felt, that there was in the affairs of mankind something unorganised which is greater than any organisation. This unorganised power is the ultimate sovereign in the world. It is a thing of the intellectual life, and it is also a thing of the will. It is something transcending persons just as physical or biological science or mathematics transcends persons. It is a racial purpose to which our reason in the measure of its strength submits us. It is what was intended when people used to talk about the Age of Reason, it was vaguely apprehended when the Victorians spoke of Public Opinion. Since writing *Anticipations* I have got into the habit of using for it the not very elegant phrase the Collective Mind.

He revolts against bureaucracy and super-organisation with the assertion that nothing much can be done for men unless men collectively will it. Collective Mind must fashion the way of salvation. In the preface from which I have quoted, we have the summary of Wells of the first period, the Wells of the scientific romances. He has travelled far in twenty years, but the changes have been definite and logical progressions. The child Wells is the father of the man Wells.

To him intelligence is always of paramount importance. It was the intelligence of the

Martians in *The War of the Worlds* that nearly made them the conquerors of the earth before they were destroyed by the earthly bacteria to which they were unused.

It is also a vital part of the Wells gospel that intelligence is of little use unless it is backed by courage, and that human society suffers almost as much from cowardice as from folly. For the man who is afraid to be anything but the obedient slave of conventions, Wells has nothing but the most complete scorn. He puts this scorn into the mouth of the artilleryman in *The War of the Worlds.*

> All these—the sort of people that live in these houses and all those damned little clerks that used to live down that way—they be no good. They haven't any spirit in them—no proud dreams and no proud lusts; and a man who hasn't one or the other—Lord! what is he but funk and precautions? They used to skedaddle off to work—I've seen hundreds of 'em, bit of breakfast in hand, running wild and shining to catch their little season-ticket train for fear they'd get dismissed if they didn't; working at businesses they were afraid to take the trouble to understand; skedaddling back, for fear they wouldn't be in time for dinner; keeping indoors after dinner for fear of the back streets; and sleeping with the wives they married, not because they wanted them, but because they had a bit of money that would make for safety in their one little miserable skedaddle through the world. Lives insured and a bit invested for fear of accidents.

And on Sundays—fear of the hereafter. As if hell was built for rabbits.

The Wells ambition is to clear the world of its rabbits and to populate it with courageous men—intelligent, resourceful, fully realising the interdependence of every member of society.

In 1908, seven years after the publication of *Anticipations*, he wrote *The War in the Air*. This was two years before Bleriot flew across the Channel and while the Zeppelin was still in its infancy. *The War in the Air* is an extraordinary anticipation of what happened during the Great War. In a new preface written last year Wells says :—

The main idea is not that men will fly or to show how they will fly ; the main idea is a thesis that the experience of the intervening years strengthens rather than supersedes. The thesis is this : that with the flying machine war alters in its character ; it ceases to be an affair of fronts and becomes an affair of areas ; neither side, victor or loser, remains immune from the gravest injuries, and while there is a vast increase in the destructiveness of war there is also an increased indecisiveness. Consequently, *War in the Air* means social destruction instead of victory as the end of the war. It not only alters the methods of war but the consequences of war.

The Great War was in many respects a fulfilment of Mr Wells's romantic imagining,

although the aeroplane and the airship did not play the supreme part in the struggle that they certainly will play in the next war, if human folly allows that to occur. In the epilogue of *The War in the Air*, Wells foretells the inevitable collapse of civilisation under the strain of the new warfare, and he claims that this collapse has already taken place in Russia and that it is still a possibility in other countries. Fact has justified fiction, and it is fair to suggest that a man who has proved that he possesses such a long range of accurate vision is a man to whom the world may well listen with attention whenever he preaches and whatever may be the text that he selects.

When the Sleeper Wakes was written "in that remote and comparatively happy year 1898." Wells was largely interested in sociology and in possible social development. He conceived a society something like Hilaire Belloc's servile state in which labour should be completely enslaved and the world ruled by a combination of financiers and industrial magnates.

He has recently confessed that he has come to the conclusion that such a world can never exist. "I was young in those days, I was thirty-two, I had met few big business men, and I still thought of them as wicked, able

men." Now he doubts both the ability and the wickedness. The doubts arose in his mind years ago, and Ostrog, the ruthless superman of *When the Sleeper Wakes*, became eleven years afterwards unscrupulous, lovable Uncle Ponderevo who made a great fortune only to lose it in *Tono Bungay*.

After re-reading *When the Sleeper Wakes*, it seems to me quite conceivable that within two or three generations international combinations of capitalists may be the actual rulers of the world instead of being, as they now are, one of the great powers behind all the thrones. It is true that the masters of industry were unable to prevent the Great War, unable or unwilling, because neither in Germany nor anywhere else did these men anticipate the economic chaos that must follow a war fought under modern conditions. They lacked intelligence. They lacked imagination.

Nevertheless, the war seems to have increased the chances of actual capitalistic domination, unless the whole fabric of the industrial world is to fall to pieces. It is unfortunately impossible to have much faith in the reconstructive power of international organised labour. Lenin has rendered international Socialism impotent for our time at least. In France, now the *clou* of Europe,

the Socialist Party is grotesquely powerless for good or ill. In England, though the Labour Party may win seats in the House of Commons, the power of labour to influence world affairs is lamentably weaker than it was before the war.

Political statesmanship throws up its hands in horror at the industrial problems with which it is faced, and a few weeks before these lines were written a serious suggestion was made for the creation of a huge international trust to finance the reconstruction of Europe. The suggestion seems to me to be eminently practicable, and possibly the only way by which the industrial machine can be re-started and the people can again be adequately fed.

If such a trust comes into being, the prophecy of *When the Sleeper Wakes* may be to some extent fulfilled. Governments would be necessarily subservient to the controllers of the trust, and, as the years went by, the trusts would become more and more dominant and more and more impatient of interference from politicians. This is exactly what happens in *When the Sleeper Wakes*.

The next step would probably be that the politicians would be swept on one side and the direction of world affairs would pass from

parliaments to the offices of captains of industry and to bankers' back parlours.

Wells says that " the thesis of a gradual systematic enslavement of organised labour presupposes an intelligence, a power of combination, and a wickedness in the class of such financiers and industrial organisers such as this class certainly does not possess, and probably cannot possess." But suppose that it can be proved that without " the enslavement of organised labour " the labourer and his wife and children must starve, where would be the wickedness of a new organisation which would provide food as the price of slavery ? Suppose—and no one acquainted with the economic conditions existing in this year 1922 throughout the Western world will dare suggest that it is any wild supposition —suppose that society has to choose between starvation or slavery, what then ?

Wells says that " much evil may be in store for mankind, but to this immense grim organisation of servitude our race will never come." I hope not. But I am not sure. It is possible that Wells has prophesied better (or worse) than he knew.

When the Sleeper Wakes is the first of the series of books which Wells calls " fantasias of possibility." The last of the series is *The World Set Free,* published in 1914 and

written after his most fertile years—1908 to 1912,—in which he wrote *Tono Bungay*, *Anne Veronica*, *The History of Mr Polly*, *The New Machiavelli*, and *Marriage*.

To me, *The World Set Free* is rather a dull book, a book definitely difficult to re-read. It has, however, already proved itself tragically accurate prophecy.

Few of us before the war dreamt of the possibility of bombs being dropped on enemy cities far behind the fighting line. But Wells did not require the war to tell him that this was a certainty of the future. His *War that Ends all Wars* takes place in 1959, and this is what happened before it has been waged very long :—

> From nearly two hundred centres, and every week added to their number, roared the unquenchable crimson conflagrations of the atomic bombs; the flimsy fabric of the world's credit had vanished, industry was completely disorganised, and every city, every thickly populated area, was starving or trembled on the verge of starvation. Most of the capital cities were burning; millions of people had already perished, and over great areas government was at an end.

Wells supposes that from the discovery of radium and radium-activity scientists had gone on to the atomic disintegration of other elements, and then to the practical employ-

ment of this release of energy. Atomic energy became the great source of power, replacing steam, electricity, and petrol. Then it was used for war. The bombs dropped from aeroplanes " were lumps of pure carolinum, painted on the outside with unoxydised cydonator inducive enclosed hermetically in a case of membranium." The admission of air " set up radio-activity in the outer layer of the carolinum sphere," and almost immediately " the whole bomb was a blazing continual explosion."

Hitherto, bombs and shells have exploded and have been done with, but the Wells carolinum bombs go on exploding for at least seventeen days, and perhaps for ever ! Faced with these horrors, the inevitable international conference was held to bring war to an end once and for all. Wells once again insists that the only possible way to ensure perpetual international peace is to create a world-state. In the novel this world-state comes into being not so much through the action of rulers and statesmen as by the subtle influence of the collective mind, which is to Mr Wells what Charles the First's head was to Mr Dick. Here is a conversation which took place at the International Conference between the King of England and the President of the United States.

"Science," the King cried presently, "is the new king of the world."

"Our view," said the President, "is that sovereignty resides with the people."

"No," said the King, "the sovereign is a being more subtle than that. And less arithmetical. Neither my family nor your emancipated people. It is something that floats about us, and above us, and through us. It is that common impersonal will and sense of necessity of which science is the best understood and most typical aspect. It is the mind of the race. It is that which has brought us here, which has bowed us to all its demands."

It seems unfortunate that the mind of the race cannot get to its work of salvation until the race has been half-destroyed by stupidity; but it is interesting to note this insistence on mind as saviour, the key-note of Wells's philosophy.

Incidentally there is a repetition of many of the details of the Wells philosophy in *The World Set Free*. "She lived in great fear of the Public Health and Morality Inspectors because she was too poor to pay the customary tip to them," is a gibe at bureaucratic tyranny. The thesis of the book is summarised on one of the later pages.

People are cruel and stupid in a stupid age who might be gentle and splendid in a gracious age. The world also has its moods. . . . Everybody in those days, wise or foolish, believed that the division of the world under a multitude of govern-

ments was inevitable and that it was going on for thousands of years more. It was inevitable until it was impossible.

Wells echoes Bible doctrine. It is only through great tribulation that society, like the individual, can inherit the kingdom.

It is the custom of some critics to dismiss the Wells scientific romances, " the fantasias of possibility," as mere clever imitations of Jules Verne, the characters being, as one writer has said, " merely puppets, marionettes, introduced for the purpose of setting off his stories about flying-machines, escalators, and a peculiar form of food." This is absurdly superficial. Wells began by using his scientific knowledge as the background for a story. Some of his stories, *The Invisible Man*, for example, are just yarns. But as he proceeded to make imaginative use of his scientific knowledge, he was first led to the writing of a series of highly interesting prophecies, many of which have already been justified, and then to the consideration of the effect of increased knowledge on the lives of men and on the development of society.

In these early books, some of which I have examined in this chapter, there is the germ of the philosophy which was afterwards to be developed in the brilliant 1908–1912 series

of novels, was to be reconsidered in the darkness of the Great War, was to have its hesitating doubts expressed in *Mr Britling Sees It Through*, and was to have its (for the moment) final expression in *The Outline of History*, *The Salvaging of Civilisation*, and *Washington and the Hope of Peace*.

CHAPTER FOUR

WELLS'S reputation as a novelist depends mainly on seven books: *Love and Mr Lewisham*, written in 1901, in his first period; *Kipps*, published in 1905; *Tono Bungay*, *Anne Veronica*, *The History of Mr Polly*, *The New Machiavelli*, and *Marriage*, published between 1908 and 1912. His two other pre-war romances, *The Passionate Friends* and *The Wife of Sir Isaac Harman*, are of less artistic value and significance. To me *The History of Mr Polly* is Wells's supreme masterpiece, and I propose to devote a separate chapter to its consideration. In many respects it is a thing by itself—a thing of magnificent individuality.

The other novels are all related to each other—chapters of Wells's criticism of modern life. The criticism is amazingly comprehensive. Great evils are denounced, but little evils are not forgotten. *Anne Veronica* is largely a denunciation of family tyranny—a big thing enough; and in the last chapter of

Kipps there is a stern gibe at the discomfort of the modern English house—want of cupboards may be a small but it is a real evil. The novels are autobiographical, in so far as for the details of his plot Wells has drawn from his own experiences as a young science student, as a shop assistant, and, in the later stories, as a politician. When *The New Machiavelli* was first published it was a favourite parlour game to guess the real names of its characters. But it is altogether an error to identify Wells with any of his creations except Britling. They may have the experience that he has had—but they are not Wells.

Mr Lewisham is an ill-paid schoolmaster. Wells was, for a little while, an ill-paid schoolmaster. Kipps is a draper's apprentice. Wells for a while was a draper's apprentice. In describing the travail of Mr Lewisham and of Kipps, however, the novelist is not actually describing the things that happened to him, but describing what might have happened to him had he not possessed the qualities that made escape possible from the worlds of Lewisham and Kipps.

At no time in his life could Wells really have been like Lewisham. At no time in his life could he possibly have resembled Kipps.

But having been in their worlds, he realises their aspirations, their troubles, and their dreams. The man, however, who possesses the power to escape can never feel the tyranny of circumstances in the same way as the man who is compelled to remain. Wells really relates the spiritual adventures that he would have experienced had he remained Mr Lewisham or had he ever been Kipps. He is not capable of the entire detachment of Arnold Bennett from his characters. If the reader sometimes feels that no half-educated weak schoolmaster would feel as Mr Lewisham feels, this in itself is a proof that the novel is in its essence the revelation of the author. Wells is telling you about Wells when he thinks he is telling you about Lewisham.

At the beginning of *Love and Mr Lewisham* its hero was a boy of eighteen—an underpaid assistant master in a provincial private school, scorning delights and living laborious days. Mr Lewisham's week was carefully mapped out. Every hour had its task. The boy was as fiercely determined to educate himself as Wells must have been when he first discovered that higher education offered a competence and began the struggle for "various grants and scholarships." Then Ethel arrived in Mr Lewisham's life and

brought love with her, and Ethel and love at once cause Mr Lewisham's dismissal from the private school.

Two and a half years pass and we meet a maturer Mr Lewisham with "an inaggressive but indisputable moustache," a student at the Kensington College of Science, living on a maintenance grant of a pound a week, earnest, of course, and shabby with (a touch of Wells's experienced realism) an india-rubber washable collar, "curiously shiny, a surface like wet gum." Mr Lewisham was a Socialist and the colour of his tie was red.

Mr Lewisham was doing well at Kensington (incidentally a girl fellow-student with brains was taking an interest in him) when Ethel and love once more appeared on the scene, and, having a hundred pounds in the bank, which he inherited from his mother, and absolutely no prospects, he persuaded the girl to marry him, and "for three indelible days Lewisham's existence was a fabric of fine emotions. Life was too wonderful and beautiful for any doubts or forethought."

Then came the tragedy of earning a living in an underpaid profession, the fading of the glamour, quarrels, disappointments, more or less harmless flirtations with the girl student aforesaid, the birth of a child—and

the final abandonment by Mr Lewisham of all hope of the career of which he had dreamed.

It is almost as if Life had played me a trick—promised so much—given so little ! . . .

No ! One must not look at it in that way ! That will not do ! That *will* not do.

Career. In itself it is a career—the most important career in the world. Father ! Why should I want more ?

And . . . Ethel ! No wonder she seems shallow. . . . She has been shallow. No wonder she was restless. Unfulfilled. . . . What had she to do ? She was drudge, she was toy. . . .

Yes. This is life. This alone is life. For this we were made and born. All these other things—all other things—they are only a sort of play.

Fatherhood and motherhood are the end and not the beginning of all things, because, such are the inane circumstances of modern life, that for Mr Lewisham and his like fatherhood means years of drudgery, daily life with a woman to whom the drudgery must bring prematurely faded looks and jaded temper, insistent anxiety concerning the feeding, the clothing, and the education of the child or children. Overboard with all your dreams, Mr Lewisham ! Overboard with all your hopes of adventure, of making a name for yourself, of serving your generation ! You are a father, and that's the end of you !

The man has capacity—but not enough

capacity and not enough hardness to escape. The man has character—but only enough character to suffer. In a rational society there would be a chance of happiness and service for Mr Lewisham. Modern society has nothing for him but anxiety and worry. "Waste" might be the second title of the novel. Futile, idiotic, damnable waste!

Artie Kipps might have gone to the school where Mr Lewisham was a master, one of those hopelessly incompetent private schools to which the lower English middle class used to send their children a generation ago, where pretentiousness attempted to hide incompetence, and where the boys learned nothing except that which is better unlearned. Happily these wretched English imitation schools have now largely disappeared.

Kipps left school unable to speak English (he called himself "a Norfan"), undeveloped mentally, fit for nothing except to be the draper's drudge that he was destined to be. Yet with all his limitations Kipps was an intensely human little man, as human as Mr Kenwigs in Dickens's *Nicholas Nickleby* —and almost equally limited.

Kipps was apprenticed by his uncle to a Folkestone draper who "set himself assiduously to get as much out of Kipps and to put as little into him as he could in the seven

years of their intercourse." He spent his day answering the ever-recurring command, " Kipps, forward," and, having aspirations, he spent some of his evenings at a wood-carving class where he met a real lady, Miss Walsingham.

Then Kipps inherited a fortune of " twelve hundred pounds a year " and set up to be a gentleman, incidentally becoming engaged to the lady of the wood-carving class. But Kipps had courage. He hated being a gentleman, and he escaped from gentility and his lady fiancée to marry a pretty young servant girl whom he had first known when he was a small boy.

Wells draws the girl, Anne, with splendid skill and sympathy—Anne with the self-control and the queer detachment from emotionalism that characterise her class. The marriage is a success, though Anne fights harder against being a lady than Kipps had fought against being a gentleman. She will have nothing to do with the lady-and-gentleman creed expressed by Kipps's uncle who told them, " It isn't what you're used to, it's what you ought to have now."

Kipps lost most of his money, started a little book shop, got his money back again as though by a miracle, and is left happy with Anne and the baby on the last page.

"I was thinking," he said to his wife, "jest what a rum go everything is." To which she replies affectionately: "Queer old Artie." And there they are. *Kipps* is a less significant story than *Love and Mr Lewisham* and the novels that follow three years afterwards. Wells uses it to demonstrate the colossal futility of what a large part of the English nation regarded as education twenty years ago, the harsh soul-destroying tyranny of life in a retail shop, and the inanity of provincial gentility. But the story is dated. In every English town nowadays there is a decently efficient middle-class school. Acts of Parliament have vastly improved the conditions and the *morale* of shop assistants. The England of 1922 is not the England of *Kipps*. But Artie remains a thing of joy, as real as Sam Weller.

The "twelve 'undred a year," too, is an utter improbability in the life of an ordinary little shop assistant, and this improbability, although it has helped Wells to tell an excellently good story, detaches the novel from reality.

Writing to Wells after the publication of *Kipps*, Henry James said :—

> You have written the first closely and intimately, the first intelligently and consistently, ironic or satiric novel. In everything else there has always

been the sentimental and conventional interference, the interference of which Thackeray is full.

You have for the first time treated the English lower middle class, etc., without the picturesque, the grotesque, the fantastic, and romantic interference of which Dickens *e.g.* is so misleadingly, of which even George Eliot is so deviatingly, full. You have handled its vulgarity in so scientific and historic a spirit, and seen the whole thing all in its own strong light.

This is the true view of *Kipps*. Kipps himself, his trouble and his love affairs, are a delightful excuse for a fine satiric revelation of the littleness, the soul-blasting conditions, of a side of English life of which Wells had personal experience and every detail of which he knew. The facts are set out with humour, with artistic selection, and with scientific accuracy.

The book suggests, as Henry James says, an interesting comparison between Wells and Dickens. Dickens fastened on some one particular and ephemeral aspect of contemporary life at which to aim his shafts of cleansing laughter. Wells goes deeper and is more comprehensive. Kipps is happy because of his fortune. Kipps, indeed, might have been happy under any circumstances with his common-sense Anne. But life for the young man, educated in the Kipps school and compelled by fate to earn his living in

the Kipps shop, must be stunted and must be burdensome and unsatisfactory, unless the man has learned to ask nothing of life and can be content with less than nothing.

Tono Bungay is a development, with greater craftsmanship, maturer vision, and infinitely more humour, of *Love and Mr Lewisham.* Some years ago, Wells said that this really great novel was written " to give a view of the whole strange advertising, commercialised civilisation of which London is the centre." I find in it a more intriguing and a more comprehensive purpose.

The story opens with George Ponderevo, its hero, living with his mother, the housekeeper at Bladesover House, in Kent. Wells's own mother occupied a similar position. He knows the point of view of the upper-servant class, their keen interest in things that do not matter in the least.—" No, Miss Fison, Peers of England go in before Peers of the United Kingdom, and he is merely a Peer of the United Kingdom."

George is banished from Bladesover because he fought and beat a " young gentleman," fighting, be it said, with complete disregard of the Queensberry rules. Wells insists that Bladesover, the typical English country house, is " the *clou* to almost all that is distinctively British."

That is no longer true. England in 1905 was still governed by the class that possessed these " places." A good deal has happened since 1905, and, if political power is still enshrined in "Granges" and "Manors," it is only when they have passed from the old families with the long lineage to the new profiteers with a long purse. Aristocratic rule in England is dead, killed, the future historian will record, not by the power of organised labour, as many people believe, but by the aggressive and democratic personality of Mr Lloyd George exercised in the electrified atmosphere of the war and the years that have followed the war. It is possible, perhaps probable, that we are at the beginning of an era of capitalistic rule; but, so far as England is concerned, the age of aristocratic rule has passed.

George was apprenticed to an uncle who was a chemist. Like Mr Lewisham, he worked hard to educate himself in (like Wells) scientific subjects, and finally, again like Mr Lewisham, he arrived in London.

In one of the early chapters of *Tono Bungay* Wells describes, with almost brutal detail, the horrible life of an evangelical struggling baker in Chatham, floundering in small debts—vulgar, unimaginative, almost inconceivably narrow. In this chapter he

again challenges comparison with Dickens. Dickens would have seen some humour in Nicodemus Frapp as he found some humour in Mr Chadband. Wells finds nothing but horror. He says: "I think my invincible persuasion that I understand Russia was engendered by the circle of Uncle Frapp." Certainly there is nothing even in Maxim Gorki more repellent than Uncle Frapp's household.

A great adventure awaited George Ponderevo when he arrived in London. The chemist uncle had preceded him and had started in the patent medicine business. The whole thing was humbug, but it was advertised with extraordinary skill and humour, and it resulted in a great fortune which grew greater and greater—until the smash came. Uncle Ponderevo, humbug though he be, is, by the way, the most lovable character that Wells ever created.

George had the mind of a scientist. He wanted to do things that mattered. But (once more like Mr Lewisham) circumstances compelled him to waste his talent—always with shame at the bottom of his heart—with money-making humbug. He was another victim of folly, another example of waste. George Ponderevo married—married as foolishly as Mr Lewisham—a shallow, brainless,

pretty girl, who took his life from him and could give nothing in exchange. After their marriage, he was maddened by her " absolute disregard of her own beauty " by her habit of wearing curl-papers in his presence, by her appalling taste in furniture. " She had no faculty of growth or change," no humour—nothing.

The Tono Bungay business burst. George's marriage went on the rocks, and the woman who had qualities which might have made her his mate—a woman of the wealthy, leisured world—turned away from him after one short hectic episode.

" I couldn't be any sort of help to you, any sort of wife, any sort of mother. I am spoilt. I am spoilt by this rich idle way of living, until every habit is wrong, every taste wrong. The world is wrong. People can be ruined by wealth just as much as by poverty."

Waste, once again ! In the end, George Ponderevo saved his soul by finding work to do—a man's work anyhow. He had dreamed of building aeroplanes, he finished by building swift destroyers. But, except his work, life had left him nothing. In his revolt against the pettiness of his wife he wrote :—

I am a spiritual gutter-snipe in love with unimaginable goddesses. I have never seen goddesses nor ever shall—but it takes all the fun out of the mud, and at times I fear it takes all the kindliness too.

The society that allows great fortunes to be made by the selling of bogus medicines, if they are sufficiently puffed, is obviously an intensely foolish society. So completely commercialised a civilisation is a false civilisation. But it is not only in material affairs that the world has gone all wrong. "Love, like everything else in this immense process of social disorganisation in which we live, is a thing adrift—a fruitless thing broken away from its connections."

Years before he wrote *Tono Bungay*, Wells protested that there was something in life greater than organisation. He has continually gibed at the niggling interference of cocksure bureaucrats; but when, in this elaborate novel, he set himself to summarise the life of his day, he found something worse than over-organisation—the complete absence of any organisation at all. It is the want of direction, the absence of plan, the failure to apply common sense to the collective life that is responsible for all the trouble, for Nicodemus Frapp's squalor in Chatham, for Uncle Ponderevo's brief glory in London, even for the failure of love.

Something is fundamentally wrong with the arrangements of life. But these arrangements are ephemeral, and the possibility remains that life may be great and wonderful.

"We are all things that make and pass, striving upon a hidden mission, out to the open sea."

Anne Veronica was published in the same year as *Tono Bungay*. It is a narrower book —the story of the revolting daughter. Feminism was in the air when the novel was written. The suffragette was being imprisoned for breaking windows and assaulting large and amiable policemen. Young women were rebelling against parental authority. There was nothing particularly novel about this rebellion. A dozen years before, under the influence of Ibsen, boys and girls in their teens were loudly announcing their determination to lead their own lives.

Fathers and husbands, however, quite naturally disapproved of the eccentricities of the feminine agitation (eccentricities which by the way unquestionably won the vote for English women) and the attempt to exercise control made the discussion of family authority topical. In 1909 *Anne Veronica* was certainly a topical novel.

Family life in England and America frequently, probably nearly always, still implies short-sighted tyranny, intolerable impertinence, and inevitable, if generally secret, revolt. Shaw has insisted on this over and over again in his plays, and Wells echoes him

in *Anne Veronica.* The man who has made an utter failure of his own life and the woman of comprehensive ignorance never hesitate to tell their children that they know what is best for them and rarely hesitate to warp lives and cripple individuality by the exercise of authority which would not be recognised but for the fact that the children of the middle class are economically dependent on their fathers. There can be such a thing as close and intimate friendship between parents and children, but no man will dare to assert that he has known many instances of such friendship. It can only exist when the parents are sympathetic realists. To quote Capes in *Anne Veronica*:

> Some day, perhaps—who knows ? the old won't coddle and hamper the young, and the young won't need to fly in the faces of the old. They'll face fact as fact and understand. Oh, to face facts ! Gods ! What a world it might be if people faced facts ! Understanding ! Understanding ! There is no other salvation. Some day older people, perhaps, will trouble to understand younger people, and there won't be these fierce disruptions ; there won't be barriers one must defy or perish.

Anne Veronica is a love story. When Anne rebels against her father and leaves home she, of course, becomes a science student—Wells always finds it hard to keep South Kensington out of his romances—and sud-

denly she falls in love with one of her teachers and throws herself at his head. Shaw always makes his heroines chase his heroes, and in *Anne Veronica* Wells seems to accept the Shavian doctrine that woman is the pursuer, man the pursued.

She sat down awkwardly and helplessly on one of the little stools by her table and covered her face with her hands.

"Can't you see how things are?" she asked.

Capes did his best to escape. He protested that he was married.

"That," said Anne Veronica, "can't prevent our loving." So off they went to Switzerland and were extraordinarily happy. The love story is told with fine knowledge, and one is glad at the end that circumstances allow Anne and her lover to marry and to be as happy married as they were when defying the conventions. It is the concessions, the compromises, the secrets, the fear that generally make marriage banal, irritating, grotesque. There is a passage in *Anne Veronica* which summarises the only conditions in which a man and a woman can live together with any chance of happiness.

There is not a compromise nor a sham nor a concession between us. We aren't afraid; we don't bother. We don't consider each other; we needn't. That wrappered life, as you call it—we burnt the

confounded rags! Danced out of it! We are stark.

I do not propose to discuss here the political criticisms and theories that are contained in *The New Machiavelli* and *The Passionate Friends.* It will be obviously necessary to return to these novels in the chapter in which I shall attempt to summarise the Wells pre-war political philosophy. The personal drama of *The New Machiavelli* and of *The Passionate Friends* is on a different plane to the drama of *Love and Mr Lewisham*, *Kipps*, and *Tono Bungay.*

In each of these five novels the protagonists are a man and two women. Mr Lewisham and George Ponderevo, impelled by crude physical passion and unprotected by what Wells would regard as sane social arrangements and conventions, marry the wrong woman and lose the right woman, to their own undoing. Kipps escapes from the wrong woman to marry his mate and save his own little soul.

The problem raised in *The New Machiavelli* and *The Passionate Friends* has nothing to do with ephemeral circumstances or social conditions. It is a problem that must remain as long as men and women exist, and which tends to become more general and more insistent, as knowledge increases and men

and women become more conscious of themselves. In both novels the two women are fine, each in her own way. In both novels the man wants them both. One calls to him in one mood. The other calls to him in another. It is this common if not universal tendency to polygamy in men, in the man of imagination just as much as in the man of mere physical desire, that has been and probably always will be the most fertile source of human tragedy.

In *The New Machiavelli*, Remington, the young politician, evidently with a brilliant career in front of him, sacrifices his career and sacrifices his wife Margaret for a woman who, with all her qualities, is his wife's inferior. Wells stresses this inferiority, realising that the tragedy of sex is that the mind and judgment have next to nothing to do with a man's choice. They evidently have nothing to do with a boy's choice, and they have hardly any greater part to play when a man of mature years and wide experience has to choose between two women.

The wind bloweth where it listeth, but man must go in whatsoever direction the wind of passion wills to drive him.

Remington's friend, Britten, taunts him with the meanness of his choice. "You're leaving a big work, you're leaving a wife

who trusted you, to go and live with your jolly mistress." Remington protests that the gibe is unfair.

"I'm not going out of this—for delights. . . . I'm going for love, Britten—if I sinned for passion. I'm going, Britten, because when I saw her the other day, she hurt me. She hurt me damnably, Britten. . . . She's ill. Don't you understand? She's a sick thing—a weak thing. She's no more a goddess than I am a god. . . . I'm not in love with her now; I'm *raw* with love for her. I feel like a man that's been flayed. I have been flayed. . . . You don't begin to imagine the sort of helpless solicitude. . . . She's not going to do the thing easily; she's ill. Her courage fails. . . . It's hard to put things when one isn't rhetorical, but it's this, Britten—there are distresses that matter more than all the delights or achievement in the world. . . . I made her what she is—as I never made Margaret. I've made her—I've broken her. . . . I'm going with my own woman. The rest of my life, and England and so forth, must square itself to that."

The trouble is that the rest of a man's life, "and England and so forth," will never square itself for the man who leaves the best for the second best, however inevitable such a choice may be. It is not a question of public opinion. It is not a question of social convention. It is the fact that only for the mean-souled can personal happiness be built on the unhappiness of another. And this becomes the more impossible when the other is somebody eminently worth while,

somebody who matters, somebody who commands admiration.

Remington felt all this when he got into the train with Isabel. I have said that though he had lost a great deal he had gained something. But Wells leaves one with a very definite impression that as the years go on the " something " gained will decrease in value and the memory of the loss will ever grow more bitter.

The New Machiavelli is a brilliant study of English politics in the first decade of this century, but it is something of far greater value than that. It is a study of sexual love of tremendous courage and honesty, and it brings Wells to the Anatole France conclusion that given certain circumstances and a certain type of man, whatever he chooses he will choose wrong, whichever way he turns, his turning must bring dull years of pain to another and bewildered disappointment to himself.

The intrigue of *The Passionate Friends*, published two years after, is the intrigue of *The New Machiavelli*, only this time the man chooses his wife rather than his mistress —and the woman pays. In every respect the novel is inferior to its predecessor. The action is slow and halting. Indeed, *The Passionate Friends* is a political pamphlet, interspersed with a love story. As I re-read

it I felt convinced that Wells was anxious to enunciate his theories of social salvation and that he doubted whether he would find many listeners unless he pretended that he was writing a novel. The story is what is known in criminal circles as the "bonnet." The reader is lured into expecting a play only to find that he is listening to a sermon.

The sermon is interesting and suggestive, but it is natural, under the circumstances, that the play should be something of a failure. The wife is a mere sketch. The mistress is something of a *poseuse*. The man is a self-conscious bore. The point of interest in the story is that Wells suggests (characteristically telling the truth, however unpalatable the truth may be) that man may love his wife, deeply and honestly, and yet be unable to resist the call of another woman, particularly of a woman whom he loved before his wife.

The drama of *The Passionate Friends* has comparatively little grip because Lady Mary, unlike Isabel in *The New Machiavelli*, is really not worth bothering about, and when she kills herself, Wells is not able to persuade us that anyone on earth is really a penny the worse. There is no tragedy in the passing of people who do not matter.

It is not true that it is always the woman

who pays. Sometimes it is the man. Very often it is both the man and the woman. But when the woman is so inconsiderable as Lady Mary, it is right and proper that it should be she who should pay.

Perhaps it was Mr Polly's Uncle Penstemon who induced Mr Wells to write *Marriage*, which was published in 1912, a year before the publication of *The Passionate Friends*. Marjorie Pope married Richard Trafford, another of Mr Wells's brilliant young scientists, and all went well with them until the day arrived (the day that, Wells says, arrives in every marriage) when " the lovers must face each other, disillusioned, stripped of the last shred of excitement—undisguisedly themselves." Then things began to go wrong.

Marjorie's extravagance became unbearable to an overworked underpaid scientist. Domestic cares interfered with his work, and the birth of a second child compelled him to give up the research, for which he had lived, and to use his scientific attainment in commerce. The man was successful but discontented, and the more successful he became the more discontented he grew, and the wider was the gulf between himself and his wife.

If Trafford was a faithful husband, he ceased to be a happy and confident one. There grew up in

him a vast hinterland of thoughts and feelings, an accumulation of unspoken and largely unformulated things in which his wife had no share, and it was in that hinterland that his essential self had its hiding-place.

In *Marriage* Wells is once more interested in problems from which humanity can never escape, rather than with the problems created by passing conditions. Men of Trafford's type do habitually marry women of Marjorie's type. They do habitually sacrifice the best of themselves on the altar of domesticity. They always or nearly always regret the sacrifice, and in the course of years they create hiding-places for themselves where they spend their real lives—solitary, secure, unhappy !

In the last part of *Marriage* Trafford and his wife go to Labrador and contrive to construct things for themselves in a series of primitive adventures. I do not find this conclusion particularly satisfactory or convincing. Wells was apparently determined to find Trafford a way out and to discover some solution for the problem of the story. I do not believe there is any solution to this problem. The sooner we learn that there are many problems which can never be solved, and the sooner we are willing to admit that complete happiness exists for most people for only a very little while and for

some people never at all, the less we shall kick against the pricks and the less inclined shall we be to add disappointment to our other burdens.

The Wife of Sir Isaac Harman is the last of the pre-war novels. Its theme is the theme of Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, and the story is told with many references to the suffragette agitation which was actual enough in 1914 but is ancient history now. The novel adds little or nothing to one's knowledge of Wells and of his attitude to the great problems of life.

CHAPTER FIVE

The History of Mr Polly is Wells's masterpiece—in acuteness of observation, in appreciation of human motives, in sympathy, in humour, the best thing that he has done. The story, slight as it is, suggests a whole series of interesting and important criticisms of life. But the suggestions are only suggestions. In *The History of Mr Polly*, Wells is for once just an artist. He never preaches. He does not even announce his text. He lets his characters speak for themselves.

The plot of the story can be very briefly summarised. Like Kipps, Mr Polly was educated at a thoroughly incompetent, lower middle class, private school. At fourteen he was apprenticed to the " hosiery and gentlemen's outfitting." For a few years Mr Polly was a not too successful " assistant." Then his father died and he inherited three hundred and fifty-five pounds. With this capital in his possession he proceeded to marry Miriam Larkin, for whom, on his wedding-day, he

felt " alarm, desire, affection, respect—and a queer element of reluctant dislike," and to set up in a small shop of his own at Fishbourne.

For fifteen years Mr Polly was a struggling shopkeeper, striving with ever-increasing difficulty to make both ends meet. He hated his shop. He hated his neighbours. As time went on he began to hate his wife. Miriam was stupid, incapable, utterly irritating, perpetually ready to grumble and scold and become limply unhelpful.

When Wells begins his history Mr Polly is thirty-seven—a miserable, hopeless man, suffering from a severe attack of indigestion. It is characteristic of Wells the scientist that he should recognise how great a part indigestion often plays in the human drama, and how fundamental may be the spiritual consequences of cold pork with " some nice cold potatoes and Rashdall's Mixed Pickles." It is this knowledge of the details of the life, the needs, and the troubles of the poor that gives Wells's books one of their distinctive notes. One remembers that it was " cubbuds " that Mrs Kipps particularly wanted when she was taking a house. Mrs Kipps's " cubbuds " and Mr Polly's indigestion are the evidence of Wells's knowledge of the life that he describes.

Mr Polly endured for fifteen years—and then he revolted. He intended to commit suicide and to burn his house down, thus providing his wife with a double insurance. The suicide did not come off, but the fire was a great success, spreading from Mr Polly's own shop to half a dozen other establishments. Excited by his own handiwork he gallantly rescued an old woman, and he became the town's hero.

Then quietly and unostentatiously he sneaked away. His wife had her insurance money. Mr Polly meant to have life. And life was ready for him at the Potwell Inn—fierce, Homeric encounters with the landlady's murderous nephew, and finally, when the nephew was vanquished, happy, easy-going content as the landlady's assistant.

Mr Polly was a born romantic, a poet, a dreamer. When a poet is forced by circumstances to spend his days in a ridiculous little shop, fighting bankruptcy, without the faintest chance of avoiding ultimate defeat, you have all the elements of human tragedy.

There are more poets in the world than we imagine. Thousands of beautiful poems exist in the dreams and the imagination of ordinary-looking men and women with no power and no desire to put their imaginings

and their dreams on to paper. But these mute poets generally have a bad time.

From his boyhood Mr Polly had loved books and dreamt of adventure. He had always believed that " somewhere—magically inaccessible perhaps, but still somewhere—were pure, easy, and joyous states of body and mind." Mr Polly preferred books of travel and adventure. He loved Joseph Conrad and Charles Lever and all Dumas, though for some reason or the other he cared very little for Dickens or for Scott. He read Boccaccio and Rabelais and Shakespeare, and he loved Falstaff and Hudibras and coarse laughter and the old England of Washington Irving and the memory of Charles the Second's courtly days.

People who have none of Wells's knowledge of the English lower middle class have suggested that this shabby little hosier, with his hunger for books and his zest for life, is an impossible creation of a romancer's imagination. But the real value of Mr Polly is that he is true. I myself know a railway worker whose reading is much on Mr Polly's lines. I know a working jeweller in Birmingham with a library that would have moved Mr Polly to the deepest envy. I have talked to miners in South Wales with Mr Polly's love for colour and adventure and joy. Mr

Polly is real. Sinclair Lewis has told me that since he came to Europe he has found that there are Main Streets in England and France and Italy as well as in the United States. Similarly there are Mr Polly's everywhere—men with a great hunger for life, a hunger which their poverty and the restriction of the circumstances among which they pass their lives forbid them to satisfy.

The distinction of Wells's particular Mr Polly is that he rebelled against circumstance and became the master of his own fate.

In a sense (a very real sense) every rebellion is a success. No one rebels against tyranny without gaining something. Mr Polly's rebellion was particularly well thought out and particularly whole-hearted. He meant to gain his freedom at any price. He was unaffected by the fact that arson is commonly regarded as a crime leading to unpleasant consequences if it be detected. I am not suggesting that a general habit of setting one's house alight is the best method for attaining spiritual freedom, but, at the same time, it cannot be denied that wholesale arson and the consequent rebuilding would be an excellent thing for most modern towns and cities. Every man must work out his own plan of salvation.

When he was quite a boy, Mr Polly had had

a real romantic love affair with a beautiful young lady, who was on one side of a high wall while he was on the other. Every day for ten whole days they talked together, and Mr Polly believed that he was a knight and that the young lady was the beautiful damsel for whom he was to fight. He never forgot the young lady. He never forgot his boyish dream. The dream made his life with Miriam the more intolerable. The dream compelled him at last to leave the stuffy atmosphere of his silly little shop for the clean air of the countryside. We are told that it is the young men who see visions and the old men who dream dreams. But no old man ever dreams unless he has seen visions in his youth, and unless those visions have compelled him in the years between youth and old age to individual achievement, to revolt, to something more than shadowhood.

All right-minded people will certainly condemn Mr Polly's desertion of his wife, his deceit in allowing her to think that he was drowned, and the whole of his proceedings at the Potwell Inn, to say nothing of the preliminary arson. But the right and wrong of any action can only be judged by its results.

Mr Polly's vehement self-assertion made a discontented dyspeptic into a thoroughly contented healthy man. That was one good

thing. His arrival at the Potwell Inn finally relieved the amiable landlady from the constant bullying of her most unpleasant nephew. That was the second good thing.

But what of Miriam? What of the wife whom he abandoned? She was discontented, unhappy, if you will, and definitely poor, while he stopped with her. When he bolted, she was able to set up a little teashop (with his insurance money) and earn some sort of a living. When, after some years, Mr Polly called on her, her only feeling was that it would be difficult to pay back the insurance money. The world is full of Miriams, and there is no good bothering about them. Many men and still more women will always be discontented and will always succeed in persuading everyone with whom they may come in contact that death is preferable to life. Self-sacrifice for such people is sheer idiocy. If Mr Polly had stopped with Miriam, where there had been one corpse there would have been two.

He tried to make her happy, but he could not do it. No person can make another person happy by trying. You either make another happy by *being* or you do not make them happy at all. As Mr Polly says: "It isn't what we try to get that we get; it isn't the good we think we do that is good. What

makes us happy isn't our trying; what makes others happy isn't our trying. There's a sort of character people like and stand up for and a sort they won't. You go to work it out and take the consequences."

When Kipps threw over his well-bred fiancée and married the housemaid it was a common man's proper horror of gentility that was his principal action motive. Passion compelled Remington to leave his wife and bolt with Isabel. Affection, a sense of duty, and a regard for his position as a father and a citizen induced Stratton in *The Passionate Friends* to prefer his wife to his mistress.

Kipps's choice did no one any harm, though the young lady was temporarily humiliated. Stratton and Remington's choice brought with them misery to another. Mr Polly's revolt—perhaps because it was entirely personal, the outcome of an overmastering desire to be himself—brought nothing but good in its train. If he had bolted from his wife with another woman, he would have exchanged one servitude for another; but he went out on to the dusty high road, alone with his dreams, an entirely free man. And Mr Polly, trudging along whistling and shabby, is a far more heroic and splendid figure than Remington drying Isabel's tears in the first-class carriage.

It requires unusual character and strength of purpose to march along the road, to the Land of Heart's Desire, without hint, suggestion—or temptation from another. Mr Polly is a great romantic figure. Wells has followed Dickens in discovering that great romantic figures sometimes wear shabby clothes and speak English with a Cockney accent. The real seer knows that drama and romance, tragedy and comedy, are all to be found on everyone's doorstep if only one has eyes to see and the heart to understand. The hack writer travels into worlds of which he knows nothing for the characters and the incidents of his stories, protesting, in his ignorance, that there is no colour in the commonplace, no movement in the mean streets. Dickens, Hardy, Wells, Bennett find colour and movement in the life of which they have an intimate knowledge.

There can, indeed, be no life without drama. Tragedy and comedy jostle each other wherever two or three men are gathered together.

It is worth noting that, in this book which I regard as Wells's greatest achievement, there is a sustained humour to be found in none of his other novels. The only characters in the Dickens novels that are really human are the comic characters. Squeers and Mrs Gamp

are human beings. Ralph Nickleby and Jonas Chuzzlewit are melodramatic unrealities. The Marchioness is a lovable young woman of flesh and blood, Agnes is a lay figure stuffed with sawdust.

Practically all the characters in *The History of Mr Polly* are comic, and they are real—Mr Polly himself, the comic dreamer, with his eager hunger for books and his curious habit of manufacturing high falutin' language as a means of expressing his revolt against the commonplace—"sesquippledam verboojuice," "eloquent rapsodoce," "urgent loogoobuosity," " stertoraneous shover," and so and so on. All Mr Polly's relations, comic characters every one of them, particularly his Uncle Penstemon, who attended his father's funeral and Polly's own wedding. Uncle Penstemon was " a fragment from the ruder agricultural past of our race."

" You've got to get married," said Uncle Penstemon, resuming his discourse. " That's the way of it. Some has. Some hain't. I done it long before I was your age. It hain't for me to blame you. You can't 'elp being the marrying sort any more than me. It's nat'ral—like poaching or drinking or wind on the stummik. You can't 'elp it, and there you are ! As for the good of it, there ain't no particular good in it as I can see. It's a toss up. The hotter come the sooner cold; but they all gets tired of it sooner or later."

Tony Weller's philosophy brought up to date!

Mr Polly's neighbours in Fishbourne are comic—Hinks, the sporting saddler; and Chuffles, the grocer, "a small, hairy, silently intent polygamist"; Tonks, the second grocer, "submerged by piety"; Rusper, the ironmonger, "a tall, lean, nervous, convulsive man"—and the rest. Even Mrs Polly is really a comic character, in her capacity to combine "great earnestness of spirit with great practical incapacity."

The clash between the artist husband and the futile dreamless wife is always told in the spirit of pure comedy. Mr Polly finds a place in the house where they might have some flowers in pots. "Not me," said Miriam, "I've had trouble enough with Minnie and her musk." There is the woman in a nutshell—as truly comic as Mrs Wilfer in *Our Mutual Friend*, and as hard to endure.

Mr Polly's escape is comic. His fights at the inn are splendid comic fights, and the conclusion of his journey with the lovably fat landlady is sane and most entrancing comedy.

Mr Polly concludes that he and all his fellow-creatures are helpless in the hands of destiny, but he has little personal quarrel

with destiny, though he remains a little bewildered.

" One seems to start in life," he said, " expecting something and it doesn't happen. And it doesn't matter. One starts with ideas that things are good and things are bad—and it hasn't much relation to what is good and what is bad. I've always been the skeptaceous sort, and it always seemed rot to me to pretend men know good from evil. It's just what I've never done."

The end is inconclusive. But so far as our knowledge goes, the end is always inconclusive. We, most of us, spend our time " expecting something ! " And for most of us, as for Mr Polly—" it doesn't happen."

CHAPTER SIX

In the months immediately preceding the beginning of the war, Wells set out to summarise his social and political philosophy. He published the volume of essays called *An Englishman Looks at the World*, and he wrote new prefaces to *Anticipations* and *Mankind in the Making*. The publication of *Anticipations* in 1901 brought him into touch with the Fabian Society which, under the leadership of Bernard Shaw and Sidney and Beatrice Webb, has been for thirty years the brains of the English Socialist movement.

Fabian Socialism has always implied government by enlightened bureaucrats, and, at first, Wells accepted such a bureaucracy as a necessity in the new society for which he yearned. It was under Fabian influence that Wells wrote *A Modern Utopia* with its dreams of a class of Samurai—enlightened, unselfish, intellectual aristocrats—which should govern not for the satisfaction of place and power but for the sake of the governed.

His connection with the Fabian Society did not last very long. It was, he said, a " never entirely harmonious marriage of mind," and his knowledge of the Webbs left him with serious doubt concerning bureaucratic government, however enlightened it might be, and distinctly sceptical concerning the Samurai whom he had himself conceived.

Nevertheless, in 1914, Wells was still a Socialist. Mr H. L. Mencken sneers at his " flabby Socialism." Another American critic speaks of his " modified Socialism—the general diffusion of equality and well-being."

Wells has said, himself, that his knowledge of concrete things was quite extensively developed before he began to consider philosophy and sociology. He approached the new problems from the point of view of a man skilled in laboratory research. The chaos of competitive, capitalistic society irritated him because of his conviction that " things are in their nature orderly." He discovered that the private ownership of things that should properly be regarded as the inheritance of the whole race led to " much obstruction and waste of human energy and a huge loss of opportunity and freedom for the mass of mankind." He accepted the Socialist faith that land, raw materials, and the instruments of the production of wealth should be owned

by the State and that private property should be restricted and terminable.

His detailed profession of Socialism was published in 1908 in *New Worlds for Old*—a book which, with some inevitable individual details, meets with the approval of the orthodox Socialist. Six years later, experience had caused him to modify his faith. He revolted against the idea that "everyone will be necessarily a public servant or a public pupil, because the State will be the only employer and the only educator," and declared that the new society for which he himself was working must be "a form of liberty and not a form of enslavement." He said :—

> I would like to underline in the most emphatic way that it is possible to have this Great State, essentially Socialistic, owning and running the land and all the great public services, sustaining everybody in absolute freedom at a certain minimum of comfort and well-being and still leaving most of the interests, amusements, and adornment of the individual life, and all sorts of collective concerns, social and political discussion, religious worship, philosophy, and the like to the free personal initiatives of entirely unofficial people.

Wells would have every citizen regarded as a shareholder in the State. As a shareholder he would be sure of a certain minimum income which he would apparently receive

whether he worked or not. If he chose to work, he would have additional wages. If he did not choose to work, he would be kept by the work of his fellows just as the Socialist contends the share-owning class is kept now.

The idea seems to me entirely fantastic, and the Fabian conception of a State, in which every man would be compelled by authority to do the work for which the bureaucracy considered him most fitted and in which laziness would be promptly punished, is much more in accord with common sense and therefore much more likely to be created than the Wells State in which there would be a comfortable dole even for the laziest.

Wells is as insistent as Chesterton and Belloc that the instinct of man demands that he shall possess property of a real and personal sort, even though he may not be able to own land or shares in railways and factories. His modified Socialism is the antithesis of Communism.

But though it is good for a man to have his own wine-cellar and his own garden patch, Wells realises that the " small holding," according to Belloc and Chesterton necessary for salvation, may be actively demoralising. In *The New Machiavelli* he makes Remington's father say :—

" Property's the curse of life. Property ! Ugh ! Look at this country all cut up into silly little parallelograms, look at all those villas we passed just now and those potato patches and that tarred shanty and the hedge ! Somebody's minding every bit of it like a dog tied to a cart's tail. Patching and bothering about it. Bothering ! Yapping at every passer-by. Look at that notice board ! One rotten worried little beast wants to keep us other rotten little beasts off his patch—God knows why ! Look at the weeds in it, look at the mended fence. . . . There's no property worth having, Dick, but money. That's only good to spend. All these things. Human souls buried under a cartload of blithering rubbish."

There is no sort of intellectual sympathy between Wells and Lenin, but even in 1914 Wells had something of Lenin's contempt for modern democratic government. He talks of " this grey confusion that is Democracy," and prophesies that it must pass away, killed by its own inherent qualities. In another place he insists that, owing to the unscientific method of voting, French deputies, American Congressmen, and English Members of Parliament are equally unrepresentative, nothing but " the illegitimate children of the Party System and the ballot-box." Democratic countries are all governed by professional politicians ; and the system, in essence, is as complete a tyranny as government by Czars. It will continue so long as the method of

election remains as it is to-day and until it is supplanted by something like proportional representation which would give constituencies the chance of expressing their real mind and of sending genuine representatives to Parliament and to Congress.

There is one part of the Socialist programme about which Wells is particularly emphatic, and that is the Endowment of Motherhood. He wrote in 1901: "Parentage rightly undertaken is a service as well as a duty to the world, carrying with it not only obligations but a claim, the strongest of claims, upon the whole community. It must be provided for like any other public service; in any completely civilised State, it must be sustained, rewarded, and controlled."

Four years afterwards, in *A Modern Utopia*, he declared that in his ideal society motherhood would be "the normal and remunerative calling for a woman, and a capable woman who has borne, bred, and begun the education of eight or nine well-built, intelligent, and successful sons and daughters would be an extremely prosperous woman, quite irrespective of the economic fortunes of the man she has married."

In 1914 he was of the same mind. "The modern State," he wrote, "has got to pay for its children if it really wants them. . . .

That is the essential idea conveyed by this phrase, the Endowment of Motherhood."

It seems a little doubtful whether any State will ever be rich enough to pay what the modern educated woman would consider a fair return for bearing, breeding, and educating eight or nine children—a task which would leave her little if any time for any other occupation, and precious little opportunity for anything but the mildest amusement for the space of nearly twenty years.

It is difficult to find an answer to the case for the Endowment of Motherhood if it be admitted that the world of to-day has some responsibility for the world of to-morrow. But it is still more difficult to understand how motherhood can be made at once the most remunerative and the most interesting of professions, and to believe, now that women have practically the same opportunities for development, for interesting work, and for individual success as men, that any large proportion of capable women will agree to bear more than one or, at the very outside, two children.

The only woman who will be attracted by the Motherhood endowment will necessarily be the comparatively incapable and unenterprising, and the consequence will be that with endowment the same conditions will continue

as exist without endowment. The least capable will have the more children and the more capable the fewer. It is certainly not clear that the Endowment of Motherhood must essentially provide the world with a more efficient race and must necessarily help towards the elimination of the comparatively unfit.

Moreover, if the State is to accept responsibility for the maintenance of children it must necessarily, sooner or later, supervise the creation of children. Wells realised this when he wrote *A Modern Utopia*. He says that from the point of view of the State marriage is only important in so far as it involves the probability of offspring, and therefore the State is justified in seeing that marriage only takes place under certain conditions.

> The contracting parties must be in health and condition, free from specific transmissible taints, above a certain minimum age, and sufficiently intelligent and energetic to have acquired a minimum education. The man at least must be in receipt of a net income above the minimum wage, after any outstanding charges against him have been paid.

In any society where this were the rule, the bride and bridegroom would have to pass an educational test and be examined by a doctor before they were granted a marriage licence. Wells suggests that the man should be at

least twenty-six and the woman at least twenty-one. All this involves novel interference with personal liberty which would certainly be very bitterly resented. It also involves the creation of new crimes—unauthorised unions, the bearing of illegitimate children.

If society is to be scientifically organised such tyranny would be inevitable. It is accepted, as a matter of course, by the Fabian propagandists. But Wells, after the writing of *A Modern Utopia*, began to rebel against super-organisation. He began to doubt whether nature was quite as orderly as he had supposed. He still clung to the Endowment of Motherhood without, so far as one can gather from *An Englishman Looks at the World*, admitting its probable consequences, unless society is to become humane enough to pay for the bad children as well as for the good, and unless the whole doctrine of eugenics, about which Wells has his doubts, is abandoned as a delusion and a snare.

Just as Wells is critical of democracy, so is he antagonistic to the social and political theorist with cut-and-dried plans for the creation of the new world, in which everyone shall be ready and willing to do exactly what he is told by some highly competent and extremely virtuous bureaucrat. The theorist

knows nothing about the realities of life, and ignores its passions, its crudities, the red corpuscles in its blood. Wells has often been more interested in passing social conditions than in vital human problems, but long before 1914 (notably in *The New Machiavelli*) he was forced by his observation and his love for truth to dig below the surface, and his digging proved to him the utter futility of schemes for social reorganisation which ignore the fierce, vehement humanity of the common natural man. Britten, in *The New Machiavelli*, says:

> "It has the same relation to progress—the reality of progress—that the things they paint on door panels in the suburbs have to art and beauty. . . . Your Altiora's just the political equivalent of the ladies who sell traced cloth for embroidery; she's a dealer in Refined Social Reform for the Parlour. . . . It's foolery. It's prigs at play. It's make believe, make believe! Your people there haven't got hold of things, aren't beginning to get hold of things, don't know anything of life at all, shirk life, avoid life, get in little bright clean rooms and talk big over your bumpers of lemonade while the Night goes by outside—untouched."

So long as reformers and philanthropists regard their fellow-men as creatures to be saved from their own folly, to be directed, to be persuaded into petty orderliness, to be compelled to throw off the qualities and the habits that make their individual lives, so long will

all schemes of social reform be a tremendous failure. Before any plan for permanently making the world happier and cleaner can be devised, there must be a recognition of the fact that man is a creature of impulse and passion, often rejoicing hugely in his sins and hugging his failings to his breast.

Wells knows this. The artist in him realises this first truth, and it is the artist in Wells that has forced him to disbelieve in scientific reform. His friend Mr Meek, the bathchair man, is poor and diseased and often miserable, but Wells emphatically believes that Mr Meek is happier in our " still largely unreformed universe " than he would be in a soulless, perfectly organised community. " The innate forces, the innate selective forces " possessed by the human mind will always be strong enough to prevent the scientific dragooning of human society.

Wells's scientific soul revolts against the Chesterton-Belloc conception of an ideal society made up of " vinous, loudly singing, earthy, toiling, custom-ruled, wholesome, and insanitary men." He dreams of a world in which there is " an almost universal freedom, health, happiness, and well-being." He has no ready-made plan for bringing such a world into existence. The one obvious method is to attack, constantly and fiercely, all the abuses,

all the cruelties, and all the stupidities that exist in our present society, while rejecting every suggestion for change that ignores fundamental human necessities. He has faith in the certainty of progress and in the capacity of men and women to retain their humanity under whatever new conditions the future may be preparing for them.

Vehemently as Wells kicks against the fussy tyrannical interferences of bureaucrats and busybodies, he cannot altogether throw overboard the belief that the direction of public affairs must pass into the hands of an ascetic aristocracy, separated from the rest of society by a devotion to duty, by a life of self-sacrifice, and by an exalted code of morals.

It is interesting to note that England was for generations governed by an aristocracy of birth that, to some extent, resembles the Wells aristocracy of mind. The English aristocrat, who filled practically every Government position of importance until the beginning of this century, was generally a man of ample means, entirely indifferent to the salary he received, often serving his country at great personal inconvenience, very often hopelessly bored by the details of official life, but recognising that inherited privileges brought with them inherited responsibilities. These English aristocrats, whether they called them-

selves Whigs or Tories, were naturally not sympathetic to political theorists who threatened the destruction of their order, but they ruled patriotically and with a large measure of common sense, and, when once great social evils were brought to their notice (as they were not very intelligent, this generally took a long time), they were ready enough to agree to remedies even when those remedies meant loss to themselves.

The development of Democracy, that has given political power not to the mass of the people but to men who belong by birth to the mass of the people, men uninfluenced by family tradition, has certainly not improved the quality of the governing class, has certainly not brought with it any more enlightened national or international policy, and could not prevent a horrible war, the consequences of which will for generations threaten the general standard of comfort.

On the face of it, therefore, there is a tremendous case for government by an aristocracy, but it is clear to me that this aristocracy must either be hereditary and therefore narrow-visioned and generally selfish, or it must be recruited from the pushing, the super-intelligent, and the people with a mania for interference with their fellows, and this means that in practice the Wells aristocracy

would be nothing more than the bureaucracy which he loathes.

In 1914 Wells was already dreaming of a world-state and foretelling the passing of existing political entities unless they could find for themselves some new significance and some new mission. The British Empire, the creation of chance, with its component nations bound together by nothing but sentimental ties, must become "the medium of knowledge and thought to every intelligent person in it, or it is bound to go to pieces."

> The Empire, mediately or immediately, must become the universal educator, newsagent, book distributor, civiliser-general and vehicle of imaginative inspiration for its peoples, or else it must submit to the gravitation of its various parts to new and more invigorating associations. No Empire, it may be urged, has ever attempted anything of this sort, but no Empire like the British has ever yet existed. Its conditions and needs are unprecedented. Its consolidation is a new problem, to be solved, if it is solved at all, by untried means.

The Empire, Wells says, was made by "exceptional and outcast men." Before the war he feared that it might be lost by commonplace and dull-minded leaders. In these comments on the British Empire there is the suggestion of the world-state which should be instinct with intelligence, created not to attain material advantage, but to serve to

fill the spiritual needs of the people. As early as 1913, in *The Passionate Friends*, there is a description of this world-state, the creation of science, art, philosophy, and literature, the four great possessions of humanity which "broaden sympathy and banish prejudice."

> Such a creative conception of a human commonweal can be fostered in exactly the same way that the idea of German unity was fostered behind the dukedoms, the free cities and kingdoms of Germany, the conception so created that it can dissolve traditional hatreds, incorporate narrower loyalties, and replace a thousand suspicions and hostilities by a common passion for collective achievement, so created that at last the national boundaries of to-day may become obstacles as trivial to the amplifying goodwill of men as the imaginary line that severs Normandy from Brittany or Berwick from Northumberland.

This is also the text of the post-war *Outline of History*. This is the text of the letters from Washington. The war, as I shall show, had a tremendous effect on Wells's outlook on life, but what is for him the only way of salvation for a world bruised and ruined by the greatest war in history, was already in his mind before the war began. The new Bible of humanity, which Wells has recently devised, with its selection of the finest from every literature in the world, was in embryo at least part of the scheme of redemption set out in *The Passionate Friends*.

This, then, was the Wells of 1914—a Socialist so long as the individual was left with those personal possessions necessary for his happiness and self-respect; a believer in government by the intelligent and efficient so long as the evils of bureaucratic busy-bodyism were avoided; a convinced believer that the nations must combine together in some sort of international world-state if harsh inequality is to be destroyed and the maximum of happiness obtained; a man in revolt against disorder, but a little fearful that scientific order may bring with it soul-destroying, inhuman over-organisation.

CHAPTER SEVEN

I SAID in the first chapter of this book that the war had a fundamental effect on the Wells philosophy. In the summer of 1917 he professed that he had "gone on very considerably." It was impossible for a man so sensitive to the life around him not to have been profoundly affected when leisurely, prosperous pre-war England became a land of dramatic surprise, tragic happenings, and most reasonable perturbation. Wells published three novels in 1915: *Boon*, *Bealby*, and *The Research Magnificent*. They are really the work of the pre-war Wells, and none of them has much importance in considering the individuality of their author.

Boon was first published under a pseudonym, although its real authorship was never more than a *secret de polichinelle*. It is a sort of parody of Henry James, a parody which the Anglo-American bitterly resented. Writing to Henry James in the summer of 1915, Wells said :—

Boon is just a waste-paper basket. Some of it was written before I left my home at Sandgate (1911), and it was while I was turning over some old papers that I came upon it, found it expressive, and went on with it last December. I would rather be called a journalist than an artist, that is the essence of it, and there was no other antagonist possible than yourself. But since it was printed, I have regretted a hundred times that I did not express our profound and incurable difference and contrast with a better grace.

The most significant thing in this letter is the remarkable admission : " I would rather be called a journalist than an artist." It is one of those tremendously courageous self-revelations that makes Wells such an interesting human being.

In 1916 Wells published *Mr Britling Sees It Through* ; in 1917, *The Soul of a Bishop* ; and in 1918, *Joan and Peter*. It is from these three novels, and particularly from *Mr Britling Sees It Through*, that we can discover the effect of the war on the soul and the mind of the novelist.

Mr Britling Sees It Through is one of the invaluable documents of the Great War. It is a careful and extraordinarily accurate record of the feelings of the English people of the liberal-minded middle class during the most menacing years in the whole history of their country. If posterity wants to know

what England felt during the first two years of the Great War—and it is probable that posterity may have a considerable curiosity in this respect—there is no contemporary record, that I know, that will tell it so much.

In 1916 the American people were still spectators of the struggle—for the most part sympathetic spectators—eager to know more of what was happening in England than they could learn from the newspapers, and this eager interest gave *Mr Britling Sees It Through* a far greater success in America than any of the Wells novels that preceded it. Wells shows in this book a complete understanding of the American point of view. In this he is once more typical, for the great majority of Englishmen thoroughly understood and appreciated the reasons that induced America to hesitate long before joining in the European welter.

Mr Britling is Wells himself. Mr Britling's spiritual and mental bewilderment and adventures were Wells's own, though, happily, the novelist did not have the tragic experience that fell to the central figure of his book. Mr Britling's Essex home is Wells's home, and all the characters are portraits of his neighbours. Colonel Rendezvous is the highly competent soldier who for some time commanded the Canadian Army in France

and is now known as Lord Byng. The journalist is Ralph Blumenfeld, the American-born editor of the *Daily Express*; Lawrence Carmine is Cranmer Byng, the oriental scholar and poet. Wells deliberately sat down to describe, in the form of a novel, the reaction of the war on himself and on the people whom he knew most intimately and understood most thoroughly.

The early chapters give an accurate picture of those long-ago days before the war, when England was unenterprising and sluggish because she was prosperous and comfortable. The nation was at the end of "a series of secure generations" in which there had been no vital material changes. It was because of the conviction that there could be no danger of a general breakdown that men and women allowed themselves to be recklessly violent in particular cases—violent in the methods of the feminist demand for votes, violent in the Carsonite opposition to Irish Home Rule. England was a pleasant disorderly go-as-you-please country. The position is summarised in a conversation between the Britlings' German tutor and an American visitor at their house.

"In Germany everything is definite. Every man knows his place, has his papers, is instructed what to do. . . ."

"Yet," said Mr Direck, with his eyes on the glowing roses, the neat arbour, the long red wall of the vegetable garden, and a distant gleam of cornfield, "it all looks orderly enough."

"It is as if it had been put in order ages ago," said Herr Heinrich.

"And was just going on by habit," said Mr Direck taking up the idea.

Like most Englishmen, Mr Britling rather gloried in the disorganisation, but, unlike most Englishmen, he realised at the same time the danger of disorganisation.

July 1914 came with the assassination of the Austrian Archduke and the possibility of war, but even then the only individual in the Britling circle who really believed that war would occur was the German tutor. Certainly, if Russia and Austria began to fight, Germany and France would be involved. Certainly, if France were threatened, England would be forced to come in. But the whole idea was preposterous, unthinkable. "The sound common sense of the mass of the German people" would hold off Armageddon. Essex was sceptical.

Events hurried on to their tragic conclusion. Herr Heinrich was called home to be a soldier, paying a sentimental farewell to his English friends. A few days afterwards all western Europe was at war. Mr Britling records the state of the English mind during these fateful

August days. Germany must be beaten. It was impossible for her to defeat the three greatest peoples in the world. However perfectly her armies might be equipped, whatever new war machine she might have prepared, whatever victories she might win at the beginning, in the end she must be defeated, and in the end the German Empire, only a little more than fifty years old, would fall to pieces. That was what England felt in 1914. It was a faith that was ultimately justified, but it was a faith that was far less robust in 1916, in 1917, and in the spring of 1918.

Wells also records the remarkable fact that, at the beginning, England was disposed to regard the war as a monstrous joke. I am not sure that this attitude of mind was common to the whole of England, but it certainly existed in London and in that part of England that shares the Cockney mind with London. It is characteristic of the Londoner to regard almost all human happenings as rather funny. He has no genius for indignation, and to him, as Wells says, the Kaiser and the Crown Prince seemed monstrously silly pantomime figures, starting a silly war which must inevitably bring about their own undoing.

As one reads Mr Britling, the beginning of the war, and indeed the war itself, seem

centuries away. The post-war chaos has made us forget the details of the days when careful English housewives were loading their store cupboards with food, when a moratorium was proclaimed, when gold sovereigns disappeared never to appear again, when the old easy order of life came to an abrupt end and a new and far less comfortable order took its place.

Thinking back, one remembers with astonishment the irrational optimism that followed the landing of the British Army in France. I remember how we all believed that the German rush would be stopped at Liège. I remember how we all believed that the French would succeed in overrunning Alsace Lorraine. Our ignorance of the conditions was pitiful. We knew nothing of the incompetence of the French leadership in those early days. We knew nothing and less than nothing. And when Hamilton Fyfe, the *Times*' War Correspondent, sent a message in which General French's forces were described as "a retreating and a broken army," Mr Britling and the rest of us were stunned.

But English optimism was hard to destroy. The idea of Zeppelins over London seemed ridiculous to Mr Britling and to the rest of us—until they came.

In 1915 England was consciously patriotic

for the first time since the reign of Elizabeth. All the men who really mattered became soldiers, or at least offered themselves for soldiers, often to be rejected. The women sent away the men they loved. It would have been shameful in 1915 for an Englishwoman to love a shirker. Mr Britling's secretary went, and then his son, a boy of seventeen, went too.

In describing the mood in which this boy marched away from home, Wells is describing the prevailing mood of all that was best in England's youth, the mood of young men like Rupert Brooke and Julian Grenfell, and a host of others, for whom the war was to mean death, and to whose passing we owe the pitiful fact that post-war England is an arid, half-hopeless country. I quote Hugh Britling :—

"I think the whole business is a bore. Germany seems to me now just like some heavy, horrible, dirty mass that has fallen across Belgium and France. We've got to shove the stuff back again. That's all. . . . You know I can't get up a bit of tootle about this business. . . . I think killing people or getting killed is a thoroughly nasty habit."

Mr Britling's next war experience was to be the host to a family of Belgian refugees. The story of the Belgian refugees in England will probably never be written in detail, but, with

few exceptions, it is certainly true that their hosts paid dearly for their kindness. It has always seemed to me one of the many ironies of the war that England came into it to protect the national rights of a small people whose citizens, long before the war ended, were generally heartily detested both by the English and the French. The vicar of Mr Britling's parish put up "some sort of journalist and quite an atheist."

"He goes out," he says, "looking for a café. He never finds a café, but he certainly finds every public-house within a radius of miles. And he comes back smelling dreadfully of beer. When I drop a little hint, he blames the beer. He says it is not good beer—our good Essex beer. He doesn't understand any of our simple ways. He's sophisticated. The girls about here wear Belgian flags—and air their little bits of French. And he takes it as an encouragement. Only yesterday there was a scene. . . . But anyhow, . . . I'm better off than poor dear Mrs Bynne. She secured two milliners. She insisted upon them. And their clothes were certainly beautifully made. . . . She thought two milliners would be so useful with a large family like hers. They certainly *said* they were milliners. But it seems—I don't know what we shall do about them. . . . My dear Mr Britling those young women are anything but milliners—anything but milliners."

There was very little bitterness in England at the beginning of the war. There was a general belief that war had been forced on

the German people by their aggressive rulers, and that many of the Germans would welcome an allied victory as a means of securing a Liberal Democratic Government. There was a general disinclination to believe the stories of atrocities, and when the Hymn of Hate was first translated into English it was read with bewildered astonishment. That was at the beginning. But hatred begets hatred, and soon there were spy hunts in England and a mighty change in the nation's mind.

Months passed and Hugh Britling, who had, like thousands of other English boys, lied about his age, was sent out to France. The boy realised that he was going from one life to another in all respects different.

"There's no real death over here. It's laid out and boxed up . . . and there; it's like another planet. It's outside. . . . I'm going outside. . . . Instead of there being no death anywhere, it is death everywhere, outside there. We shall be using our utmost wits to kill each other."

The boys went away and the older men were left at home to face, with aching anxiety in their hearts, rising prices and falling incomes, to know that every week some frightfully expensive blunder was made, and that, over and over again, victory was missed through the incapacity of the staffs.

Britling's secretary was reported "Wounded

and Missing," and then came the fatal telegram telling Britling that his son was killed. England grew very familiar with those telegrams. It came to be considered bad form to ask men at the club about their boys at the Front. It was unfair. If the worst had really happened, as it so often had, the question made it harder for the man to keep that stiff upper lip which is England's pride. The Englishwoman was more dramatic, more resentful. The secretary had a young wife. The words "Wounded and Missing" brought with them a horrible wearing uncertainty. The idea that her young husband might be dead seemed to the girl to be the condemnation of the whole scheme of things.

"You see, if he is dead, then cruelty is the law and someone must pay me for his death. . . . Someone must pay me. . . . I shall wait for six months after the war, dear, and then I shall go off to Germany and learn my way about there. And I will murder some German. Not just a common German but a German who belongs to the guilty kind. A sacrifice. . . . I shall prefer German children. I shall sacrifice them to Teddy."

This was not a very common mood, but it did exist. Britling took his loss in a different spirit. He declared that he was neither angry nor depressed, only "bitterly hurt" by the ending of something fine, by the death of a boy of eighteen. The man was not content to

grieve. It was folly that had killed his son —the human stupidity at which Wells has girded in all his books and which came to a frantic head during the war. And it was the business of every sane man to end such folly, to prevent further sacrifices on the altar of a Moloch of criminal stupidity.

Then, in his bitter sorrow, Mr Britling found God. This is the vital change in the Wells philosophy caused by the war. This is the "considerable progress" which he claims for himself. The God he found is not an omnipotent God. He is not responsible for the horrors of human life, but some day He will triumph and then horror will cease. There is cruelty and injustice and aggression in the world, but there is also kindness and goodness and love, and these are the signs of God—the God who struggles, the God who will ultimately prevail.

Heinrich, the German tutor, was killed too. Mr Britling heard the news from a friend in Norway, and he wrote a long letter to Heinrich's father and mother, sending them some snap-shots, in one of which his boy and theirs were taken together. "They are, you see, smiling very pleasantly at each other."

After he had written his letter, Mr Britling sat for hours in deep, pained thought. The

folly must be destroyed for the sake of the dead boys, and it was the dead boys who had shown the way in which the folly could really be destroyed. They " have shown us God." This is the conclusion. " Religion is the first thing and the last thing, and until a man has found God and been found by God he begins at no beginning, he works to no end."

It is said that men have always created Gods in their own image. This means that men have always contrived to find the Gods that they need. Wells's God is his own God, with characteristics which I shall summarise in the next chapter. Here the point of interest is that it was the war that convinced him that without the help of some God there could be no hope of the conquest of folly and evil, no possibility of creating the world-state.

It would be untrue to suggest that the war convinced the mass of the people of England, or of any other country, of the need of God. In this respect Wells cannot be taken as typical of his nation. His fellows shared his bewilderment, but a very few of them shared his discovery. That is what always happens. The man with the super-acute vision first sees the light. He discovers the way out. He is the pioneer. Perhaps his fellows will listen to him, perhaps they will follow, though there

is little evidence of any such thing happening here in England in 1922.

In *The Soul of a Bishop* Wells asserts that however evil the war may have been, it was at least something great, infinitely the greatest thing that had happened in the lives of the people who were living in England in 1914. It forced such of them as had imagination and power of understanding for the first time to realise "the epic quality of history and their own relationship to the destinies of the race."

All the comfortable certainties of material life disappeared. Even the most unadventurous were compelled to recognise that life might be an adventure with infinite perils. This happened at the beginning. As the war went on, and Zeppelins and Gothas dropped bombs in city streets and suburban back gardens, the sense of security, which the English had hugged to their bosoms for centuries, was destroyed, once and for all. I do not suggest that there will be no more wars. I do not even suggest that England may not, perhaps within an approximately short time, be involved in another war. But if war does occur, the non-combatants will know that death is almost as likely for them as for the soldier in the fighting line.

Such is the curious mentality of the English,

that this knowledge will probably not make for permanent peace, for the one curious fact that the Great War proved was that very few men and probably very few women are really afraid of death. When the Zeppelins first came to London the streets were crowded. The people of London had never seen a Zeppelin before. It was a strange and beautiful sight, and curiosity was far greater than fear.

In *The Soul of a Bishop* Wells notes that the outbreak of war was followed by an unprecedented national solidarity. Quarrels and controversies were forgotten. All classes were eager to perform some sort of genuine national service. This mood did not last. It ended long before the war ended, but while it existed it was a suggestive and heartening phenomenon. If the people of one nation could be persuaded always to realise that they were members one of the other, then the Wells world-state would not be little more than a misty dream. Unhappily, it would seem that national solidarity can only be realised in face of some great peril and (so evil is the human heart) that it is likely to vanish into thin air before the peril has disappeared.

Wells returns to the war in the latter part of *Joan and Peter*. Peter and his guardian

were in Berlin just before the war broke out, and in Berlin they saw the Kaiser, that curious, significant, and sinister figure who, probably unjustly, will represent for ever the malevolent influences that made the war inevitable. Wells describes him very finely as: "Something melodramatic, something eager and in a great hurry, something that went by like the sounds of a trumpet, a figure of vast enterprise in shining armour. . . . Something very modern and yet romantic, something stupendously resolute . . . going magnificently somewhere."

Peter, the keen boy in his early twenties, is obsessed with the futility of the pre-war world. In it he finds nothing but "muddle and muck and nonsense indescribable." The whole world is suffering from boredom, "boring on to decay." The war came and, of course, nothing was ready. The country for all its patriotic enthusiasm was just "a crowd adrift." This is quite true, but I do not think that Wells has sufficiently recorded the extraordinary power of improvisation shown by the British people in 1915. An essentially unmilitary people became militarist. A people much inclined to repeat Johnson's gibe at patriotism became self-sacrificingly patriotic. An indolent pleasure-loving people became frantically industrious.

There is no parallel in the history of the world to the creation of Kitchener's Army, which, led with tragic inefficiency, faced death calmly and humorously at Loos in September 1915, and in the summer of 1916 was the British Army that routed the Germans on the Somme. There is nothing in history quite parallel to the national service rendered by Englishwomen in a thousand different ways from '15 till the end of the war. It is natural that Wells should emphasise the general unreadiness to meet a great danger and the appalling stupidity in high places; but it cannot be denied that the real people of England, the people whom Dickens loved and to whom Wells belongs, demonstrated not only courage but amazing intelligence in swiftly adapting themselves to new conditions and arming themselves to face a peril of which they had never dreamt.

The intelligence of the people was sufficient to overcome the steady, invincible stupidity that dominated the War Office at the beginning, turned victory into defeat a score of times, and flourished in brass hats when at last the Armistice came. The English people not only helped to beat the Germans, they temporarily conquered the stupidity of their own rulers. "Youth," says Wells, "grew wise very fast in those tremendous days."

And common average middle age, and even old age, grew wise with youth, though it is all too true that " no story of these years can ever be true that does not pass under a shadow."

The conscientious objectors were a strange and unpleasant phenomenon in the England of the war, and Wells has written in *Joan and Peter* a biting picture of the " advanced " minority who refused to march with their fellows. With curious inconsistency, these strange folk have, for the most part, been busy since the war stirring up revolution, apparently believing that no war is justifiable except civil war. Wells's conscientious objectors were the Sheldricks.

The Sheldricks were like seedlings that begin flourishing and then damp off. . . . Energy leaked out of them with adolescence. They seemed to possess the vitality for positive convictions no longer, and they displayed a distinctive hostility to any wave of popular feeling that threatened to swamp their weak but still obstinate individuality. Their general attitude towards life was one of protesting refractoriness. Whatever it was that people believed or did, you were given to understand by undertones and abstinences that the Sheldricks knew better and, for the most exquisite reasons, didn't. All their friends were protesters and rebels and seceders, or incomprehensible poets or incapable artists. And from the first the war was altogether too big and too strong for them. Confronted by such questions as to whether fifty years of belligerent

preparation, culminating in the most cruel and wanton invasion of a peaceful country it is possible to imagine, was to be resisted by mankind or condoned, the Sheldricks fell back upon the counter statement that Sir Edward Grey, being a landowner, was necessarily just as bad as the German Junker, or that the Government of Russia was an unsatisfactory one.

This is the Wells conclusion of the matter, the moral of the war, as Wells saw it a year or so before it came to an end. Thousands of British lives had been wasted. Victory had continually been deferred by the British contempt of thought and science and organisation. Stupidity in large matters, stupidity in small matters. Smug self-sufficiency that allowed advantages to be lost. Professional pride that refused to listen to lay warnings. And all the time, a people, stout at heart and instinct, with humour and common sense, the common English people, the Sam Weller England, that saved the English gentlemen from the fate of their Russian brothers. That was the war as far as England was concerned. And for the future? What can save England and the world from another such experience? Only work and learning. "We cannot make terms with any other creed."

CHAPTER EIGHT

In 1901 Wells wrote: "Either one must believe the universe to be one and systematic, and held together by some omnipresent quality, or one must believe it to be a casual aggregation, an incoherent accumulation with no unity whatsoever outside the unity of the personality regarding it. All science and most modern religious systems presuppose the former, and to believe the former is, to anyone not too anxious to quibble, to believe in God. But I believe that these prevailing men of the future, like many of the saner men of to-day, having so formulated their fundamental belief, will presume to no knowledge whatever, will presume to no possibility of knowledge of the real being of God. They will have no positive definition of God at all. They will certainly not indulge in 'that something, not ourselves that makes for righteousness' (not defined) or any defective claptrap of that sort."

To the Wells of twenty years ago, God was

only " a pervading purpose "—" He comprehends and cannot be comprehended, and our business is only with so much of His purpose as centres on our individual wills." In 1908 Wells published his *First and Last Things*, which he described as a " Confession of Faith and Rule of Life." In 1917—in the third year of the war—he published *God the Invisible King*, and at the same time issued a new and revised edition of *First and Last Things*. In the preface to this new edition Wells wrote : " Since 1908 the writer has changed his general views but little ; there has been little of positive retraction in this revision ; he has, however, gone on very considerably."

Here is a definite admission that the dramatic, tragic, and urgent events of the war had their effect in hurrying Wells along the road, upon which he had already taken the first step, towards the goal of faith. Both the artist and the scientist in Wells made a belief in some sort of God imperative. The scientist declined to believe that this life was utterly ineffectual and meaningless. He was convinced that he, himself, must be a part, indeed a rather important part, in some scheme, and it is impossible to conceive a scheme that has not emanated from the brain of a schemer. Then the artist in Wells

was attracted by such fine phrases as the Will of God, the Hand of God, the Great Commander.

In 1908 he was still dreaming of the world-state, a Kingdom of Heaven on earth, but he realised that the philanthropic idealists whom he had drawn in *The New Machiavelli*, in *The Passionate Friends*, and in *Marriage* were certain from the beginning to fail because "they relied for their strength upon themselves." Success can only come when "the impulse to serve mankind comes from a source outside of and greater than one's individual good intentions,"—the very "something not ourselves making for righteousness," at which Wells had jeered seven years before.

Wells continually anticipated the possibility of a great war that should vitally affect the life of the Western world and possibly threaten the continuance of its civilisation, though even his prophetic vision could not anticipate the long drawn-out struggle and the complete economic chaos that has followed victory and defeat. During the war Wells lost faith in the power of man to reach that heaven of his heart's desire which he calls the world-state without extraneous aid.

The stupidity, the narrow vision, the wickedness in high places that made Western Europe

a shambles from August 1914 to November 1918 made it impossible to believe that man, without some radical change of mind and spirit, will ever be able to work out his own salvation. The war made our boasted progress a sham, and compelled us to realise that in all essentials mankind was in practically the same position as it was centuries before.

The impetus therefore towards regeneration must be sought outside man himself. In *God the Invisible King*, Wells goes back to the familiar evangelical position that society can only be saved by individuals who have been saved, individuals who have experienced a change of heart and have been born again. The indefiniteness and the innumerable qualifications of 1908 have been thrown overboard.

Wells sets out his new position with admirable courage and clearness of expression. " This," he says, " is a religious book written by a believer "—a believer who rejects the triune God of orthodox Christianity but who has complete faith in God the Redeemer. Wells asserts that the word " God " is used for two entirely different Beings, the outward God, the creator of the world, ruling perhaps with justice but certainly without affection, and the God of the Human Heart. These two conceptions of God appear in the Trinity as the Father and the Son. Even as a

mystical metaphor Wells cannot accept the relationship.

To him the Creator is a Veiled Being, and he asserts that we do not know and perhaps cannot know in any comprehensible term the relation of the Veiled Being to that living reality in our lives who is, in his terminology, the true God. Wells points out that many of the Christian sects that existed before the publication of the Nicene Creed believed that the God of the Human Heart, the Christ God, and the God of nature were bitter antagonists, and that this also was the belief of Shelley.

Wells does not consider that the relationship between the two Gods is of any real importance. It is only the God of the Human Heart that matters to mankind. The God that is Almighty, omniscient and omnipresent, has little interest for him. His God is the maker neither of heaven nor of earth, but He is a God of Salvation—" a spirit, a person, a strongly marked and noble personality, loving, inspiring, and lovable, who exists or strives to exist in every human soul."

The Life Force, the Will to Live, with which Bernard Shaw is so concerned and which is a matter of enormous interest to philosophers unable to conceive the idea of God at all, is, Wells suggests, an emanation from the Veiled Being with no connection

whatever with the God of the Heart. "God comes to us neither out of the stars nor out of the pride of life, but as a still small voice within. . . . He is the immortal part and the leader of mankind."

No man by reasoning can find out God. This is the mystical defiance of the scientific spirit, and Wells the scientist accepts the statement as being absolutely and fundamentally true. The realisation of God comes suddenly, mysteriously, the reply to a deep yearning need.

> It is the attainment of an absolute certainty that one is not alone in oneself. It is as if one was touched at every point by a being akin to oneself, sympathetic, beyond measure wiser, steadfast, and pure in aim. It is completer and more intimate, but it is like standing side by side with and touching someone that we love very dearly and trust completely. It is as if this being bridged a thousand misunderstandings and brought us into fellowship with a great multitude of other people. . . .
>
> "Nearer is He than breathing, and closer than hands and feet."

Wells claims that his idea of God is identical with the Christian idea of the risen Christ, but he will not identify his God with the man Jesus. He does not even admit that Jesus was the founder of our faith. In *The Outline of History* he says that it was the followers of Jesus who founded the great universal re-

ligion of Christianity, and in *God the Invisible King* he constantly traces back the doctrines of orthodox Christianity to the Nicene Creed, and particularly to the "little, red-haired, busy, wire-pulling Athanasius," for whom, as E. T. Raymond has pointed out, Wells has a particularly fierce hatred.

He accepts neither Christian theology nor the Christian ethic in its entirety. To him quietism is a damnable heresy. The finding of God is not "an escape from life and action; it is the release of life and action from the prison of the mortal self." The Wells God is militant. His followers must also be militant and aggressive.

Wells quotes with approval a statement by the present Bishop of Manchester that, owing to the war, men have gained faith "in Christ as an heroic leader." They think of Him less as being just meek and gentle, and they remember the vision of Him which says: "He had in His right hand seven stars; and out of His mouth proceeded a sharp, two-edged sword; and His countenance was as the sun shineth in its strength."

The whole idea of God is meaningless to Wells unless He constantly incites towards vehement endeavour in the fight for a better world. In this respect, Wells's conception of God is much the same as Queen Elizabeth's

in Miss Clemence Dane's play *Will Shakespeare* :—

I'll not bow
To the gentle Jesus of the women, I——
But to the man who hung 'twixt earth and heaven
Six mortal hours, and knew the end (as strength
And custom was) three days away, yet ruled
His soul and body so, that when the sponge
Blessed his cracked lips with promise of relief
And quick oblivion, He would not drink :
He turned His head away and would not drink :
Spat out the anodyne, and would not drink.
This was a God for Kings and Queens of pride,
And Him I follow.

Commenting on Wells's discovery of God, Gilbert Chesterton has written :—

He called his book *God the Invisible King* ; but the curious point was that he specially insisted that his God differed from other people's God in the very fact that He was not a king. He was very particular in explaining that his deity did not rule in any Almighty or Infinite sense ; but merely influenced, like any wandering spirit. Nor was He particularly invisible, if there can be said to be any degrees in invisibility. Mr Wells's Invisible God was really like Mr Wells's Invisible Man. You almost felt He might appear at any moment, at any rate to His one devoted worshipper ; and that, as in old Greece, a glad cry might ring through the woods of Essex, the voice of Mr Wells crying, " We have seen, He hath seen us, a visible God."

Mr Chesterton says that the Wells religion is " the selection of a single spirit out of many

there might be in the spiritual world," and that its trend is " to polytheism rather as it existed in the old civilisation of Paganism."

I have quoted this criticism by a witty orthodox writer, because it puts very clearly the fundamental difference between Christianity and the Wells religion—a difference which Wells himself is eager to emphasise. But in one respect Chesterton's criticism is distinctly unfair. Wells does not suggest that each human heart may be its own private God helping towards righteousness, kindliness, and a useful life. His creed is that there is at our elbows a God of the Human Heart, ready to help all of us, if we invite His aid.

Wells makes the rather curious suggestion that children have no natural love for God and no need of Him, while God on His side does not clamour for children's attention. " He is not like one of those senile uncles who dream of glory in the nursery." He suggests that children should just be told that God is a great friend whom some day they will need and know. The need comes with adolescence.

The love of man for God is pure exaltation. The love of God for man is austere. " God must love His followers as a great captain loves his men, who are foolish, so helpless in themselves, so confiding, and yet whose faith

alone makes Him possible. . . . The spirit of God will not hesitate to send us to torment and bodily death." Man is won from the enemy often only after a fearful struggle, and " we come staggering through into the golden light of His Kingdom, to fight for His Kingdom henceforth until we are altogether taken up into His being."

It is impossible to believe in God as the Invisible King without at once dreaming of the coming Kingdom of God on earth—Wells's world-state. The consequence of this conception is that the individual is filled with the desire to make himself a fit citizen for such a state and to devote his entire energy to its creation.

The citizenship demands the same character and conduct which Wells gives to his Samurai in *A Modern Utopia*. He tells us almost in the words used every Sunday in every Christian pulpit that the power of God can work miracles to change habits and character. The will to prevail over natural vices is buttressed by a boundless strength outside the individual. Man cannot be damned when he has once found God. He may sin seventy times seven but he will still be forgiven. " Nothing but utter blindness of the spirit can shut a man off from God. . . . There is no sin, no state that, being

regretted and repented of, can stand between God and man."

In *A Modern Utopia* Wells says: "The leading principle of the Utopian religion is the repudiation of the doctrine of original sin; the Utopians hold that man on the whole is good. That is their cardinal belief." There is nothing to show that Wells has abandoned this Utopian faith, but it is clear that if he still holds that man is good, he has also learned that man is weak, unable to play his proper part in the drama of life without mystical help.

Wells professes to be unconcerned with the question of personal immortality. To the man who has faith, death can have no terror. And while he admits that the death of those we love is hard to understand and harder still to endure, he, at least, finds no consolation in believing that they still exist "in some disembodied and incomprehensible elsewhere, changed and yet not done." The dead whom we have loved are immortal memories for us who remain.

In a beautifully written passage—*First and Last Things*—Wells refers to his own friends whom he has loved and who are here no more, and he laughs to scorn the idea that a man like the late W. E. Henley could "conceivably be tapping at the underside of a

mahogany table or scratching stifled incoherence into a locked slate." If, Wells says, Henley were to find himself at a Spiritualistic séance he would "instantly smash the table with that big fist of his."

The post-war world, with its heavy cohorts of mourners whose grief becomes little more bearable as the years go on, has naturally endeavoured to find consolation in the idea that the dead can come back to us and that actual communion can take place between the two sides of the veil. One might have more faith if the means of communication were less suggestive of trickery and the communications themselves were less banal. As it is, one cannot escape the conviction that the present outbreak of Spiritualism is one of the many evils the world is paying for the greatest blunder in history. It is well to have one loud strident common-sense voice in the world of spooks and shadows.

Wells's criticism does not touch the greater, finer belief of immortality in a greater, finer world, where the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest. There is courage and inspiration in the following comment on death:—

> When we have loved to the intensest point, we have done our best with each other. To keep that image of the inn, we must not sit overlong at our

wine beside the fire. We must go on to new experiences and new adventure. Death comes to part us and turn us out and set us on the road again. But the dead stay where we leave them.

So, as the late Professor Clifford said: "Let us join hands and help one another for to-day we are here together."

The Soul of a Bishop is a sort of dramatised development of *God the Invisible King*. No man can conceivably write as much as Wells has written without often falling far below his best, without sometimes writing a book that honest criticism must write down as a failure. Both *The Passionate Friends* and *The Wife of Sir Isaac Harman* are failures, and so, to an even greater degree, is *The Soul of a Bishop*.

To me, *God the Invisible King* is intensely interesting, the revelation of the adventures of a brave and original thinker, searching for a basis of faith, with a determination to find that basis, even if at the end he finds it necessary to create it for himself. But when, in *The Soul of a Bishop*, Wells uses his personal search for the truth and his individual conclusions as the background for a novel, the result is irritating and the novel certainly has no chance of any artistic existence. In *The History of Mr Polly* Wells shows that he has abundant humour. The discovery of

God seems to have in some unfortunate way robbed him of his humour, else surely he would never have imagined the tiresome, priggish Bishop of Princhester and the extraordinarily foolish Lady Sunderbund.

In *The Soul of a Bishop* Wells repeats his belief in the existence of two Gods, never necessarily in harmony, possibly in opposition to each other. The Gnostics had this same belief.

> They said that the God in your heart is the rebel against the God beyond the stars, that the Christ in your heart is like Prometheus—or Hiawatha—or any other of the sacrificial gods, a rebel. He arises out of man. He rebels against the High God of the stars and crystals and poisons and monsters and of the dead emptiness of space.

Practically all religions have striven to tell something of the relationship that exists between these two Gods. But this is a matter beyond the power of the human brain to understand, and man, Wells insists, must be content to know the God whom he can hug to his heart. "He is courage, He is adventure, He is the King, He fights for you and with you against death."

CHAPTER NINE

SINCE the war, Wells has published a novel, *The Undying Fire*, *The Outline of History*, *Russia in the Shadows*, *The Salvaging of Civilisation*, and *Washington and the Hope of Peace*. As I am writing this book, *The Secret Places of the Heart* is appearing serially in a magazine, and for obvious reasons this story must remain outside my survey.

The Undying Fire was published in the summer of 1919, at the time when the Treaty of Versailles was signed to bring more trouble into an already sufficiently troubled world. The story is moulded on the Book of Job.

Wells's Job is a Norfolk schoolmaster round whose unlucky head a wilderness of misfortune accumulates—an epidemic, an explosion in the school laboratory, the loss of his savings, and finally a terrible illness which a doctor tells him is cancer. Job is staying in uncomfortable lodgings with a nagging wife when his " comforters " arrive to try him still further. But Wells's Job is a big man. He has looked

out on the world and seen the real cause of the pain, the failure, and the hopes deferred. He is indignant with the common shallow thinking and the cowardly running away from problems. He scorns the notion common in 1919 that we had won the war in order to take "the place of the Germans as the chapman-bullies of the world." He is indignant that the majority have learned nothing from the war and that "they are being their unmitigated selves more than ever." His thoughts turn to the use of poison gas during the war, and he asks, "Why do men do such things?" He answers his own question :—

> They do not do it out of a complete and organised impulse to evil. If you took the series of researches and inventions that led at last to this use of poison gas, you would find they were the work of a multitude of mainly amiable, fairly virtuous, and kindly meaning men. Each one was *doing his bit* . . . ; each one . . . was *being himself* and utilising the gift that was in him in accordance with the drift of the world about him ; each one . . . was modestly *taking the world as he found it.* They were living in an uninformed world, with no common understanding and no collective plan—a world ignorant of its true history, and with no conception of its future. Into these horrors they drifted for the want of a world education. Out of these horrors no lesson will be learnt, no will can arise, for the same reason. Every man lives ignorantly in his own circumstances, from hand to mouth, from day to day, swayed first of all by this catchword and then by that.

The Undying Fire is a fine book, an invaluable comment, a bitter record of post-war disillusionment. The characters are discussed with abundant humour. The hand that wrote *The History of Mr Polly* has not lost its cunning. The end of the story is happy and human.

This novel has an important place in the development of the Wells philosophy, and may properly be regarded both as an introduction to *The Salvaging of Civilisation* and an explanation of the reasons that induced Wells to write *The Outline of History*. With the rest of us, he had believed that great fundamental lessons would be learned from the experiences of the war. The wild profiteering orgies that followed the Armistice and the muddled hesitation of the Peace Congress showed that he (and the rest of us) were wrong. Far from the world-state being nearer, it seemed farther away than ever, and Wells concludes that there can be no permanent peace on earth, no resolute well-devised attempt to deal with industrial evils, no world-state without a new World Education. Common understanding and collective plans will only be possible when the men of all nations have learned from the history of the past their near relation to each other.

Having learned the past, having surveyed

the road over which they have travelled, men will then have some chance of laying out the new road, of tramping together towards a haven where common sense shall conquer stupidity and good intent shall be victorious over cruelty and oppression. Such a haven is a real possibility. " Quite a few resolute men could set mankind definitely towards such a state of affairs so that they could reach it in a dozen generations or so."

The Outline of History was published in 1920. This amazing work, which has vastly increased Wells's fame both in England and in America, is of so great importance and interest that I propose to devote a special chapter to its consideration.

In the same year Wells went to Russia to see for himself the actual workings of a Communist State. His observations are recorded in his *Russia in the Shadows.* It would not be relevant to my purpose here to quote Wells's opinion of Lenin and Trotsky, or even of Karl Marx whose much bewhiskered busts, to be seen everywhere in Bolshevist Russia, caused him the most acute annoyance. He insists that the present unhappy condition of Russia is to be traced to causes that may bring about a similar state of affairs in other countries. It was first the war and then " the moral and intellectual insufficiency of its ruling and

wealthy people " that brought Russia to its present state of misery. The ruling and wealthy class is morally and intellectually insufficient in other countries—in Great Britain and even in America—and so long as it is allowed to rule, to waste, and to quarrel, so long must civilisation be imperilled.

Wells is still an Evolutionary Collectivist. " I believe," he says, " that through a vast sustained educational campaign the existing capitalist system can be civilised into a Collectivist world system." On the other hand, Lenin, with whom he had a long conversation in Moscow, believes that capitalism is " incurably predatory, wasteful, and unteachable." It must be absolutely destroyed. The world must be rid of it before anything better can be created.

Between the two points of view there is complete and irreconcilable hostility, and Wells found in Russia pedantic intolerance, foolish blindness to human need, and not a little incapacity in high places. But he has this in common with Lenin, that both of them have " a vision of a world changed over and planned and built afresh."

Russia seemed to him to be suffering from an irreparable breakdown. He left the country with the conviction that, for the time anyhow, the Bolshevist Government is the only

possible government, and he contends that, unless the rest of Europe co-operate in helping Russia to reconstruct, the ruin of that great eastern half of Europe will eventually ensure the complete economic ruin of the whole of Europe. Never were nations more mutually dependent, never were the rulers of the nations readier to disregard that vital fact.

In 1921 Wells published *The Salvaging of Civilisation*. Before the war, and even during the war, Wells was something of an optimist. He was able to believe that folly would ultimately be conquered and that cruelty would be one day trampled under foot. The Peace of Versailles and the consequences of the Peace left him with vastly diminished faith. In *The Salvaging of Civilisation* he said :—

> This world of mankind seems to me to be a very sinister and dreadful world. It has come to this—that I open my newspaper every morning with a sinking heart, and usually I find little to console me.

Wells does not, however, sorrow as those entirely without hope. The title of his book implies that he has a plan of salvation—the old plan of salvation set forth a dozen times before. Mr Joseph Chamberlain told us to think Imperially. Wells bids us think Europeanly if we would be saved.

If Europe is to be saved from ultimate disaster, Europe has to stop thinking in terms of the people of France, the people of England, the people of Germany; the French, the British, the Germans, and so forth. Europe has to think at least of the people of Europe, if not of the civilised people of the world. If we Europeans cannot bring our minds to that, there is no hope for us. Only by thinking of all peoples can any people be saved in Europe. Fresh wars will destroy the social fabric of Europe, and Europe will perish as nations, fighting.

Wells compares the state of Europe, with its multiplication of frontiers, its differences of language and of currency, its custom-houses and its international jealousies, with the happy oneness of the United States.

The world has never seen before a community like the United States, and there is, Wells says, the same difference between the United States and a country like France as there is between an automobile and a one-horse shay. The American lives in a huge political unity. Europe is being strangled by a net of boundaries. American patriotism is a continental patriotism. European patriotism is very often nothing but parochial patriotism.

The Peace, instead of helping towards the creation of confederacies of nations, has created a number of small weak states, each with its own boundary, each with its custom-

houses, each with its own currency. The encouragement of these petty patriotisms makes the possibility of war greater.

" Every country in Europe," says Wells, " is its own Sinn Fein cultivating that silly obsession of Ourselves Alone." He adds : " Ourselves Alone is the sure guide to conflict and disaster, to want, misery, violence, degradation, and death for our children and our children's children—until our race is dead."

The horrible possibilities of a second world war must be obvious to everyone. There was a definite increase in frightfulness and destructiveness during the course of the last war, and the next war will begin far beyond the point where the last war finished. " The victor in the next great war will be bombed from the air, starved and depleted almost as much as the loser. His victory will be no easy one ; it will be a triumph of the exhausted and dying over the dead."

The conditions that have brought wars about in the past still continue, and have, to some extent, been aggravated by the Peace and by the events that have happened since the Peace. Civilised society is, as Wells insists, in danger of complete destruction, and this destruction can only be averted by the conscious, systematic reconstruction of human society.

The comparison between the United States and European countries leads Wells to plead for the creation of the United States of Europe, but this would only be a step towards the world-state, for "if we work for unity on the large scale we are contemplating we may as well work for World Unity."

The League of Nations is all very well in its way, but "it has no unity, no personality." The world-state would be a reality—something that could arouse enthusiasm, something that could kindle a fine, inspiring, and all-embracing patriotism. In his former books, Wells was content to leave the world-state as a vague ideal. In *The Salvaging of Civilisation* he suggests the actual government for such a state. The world-state will be ruled by a World Council which Wells imagines will be "a very taciturn assembly." It will not meet very often, and its members will generally communicate their views to each other by notes.

There will be a Supreme Court determining *not* International Law, but World Law. There will be a growing Code of World Law.

There will be a world currency.

There will be a ministry of posts, transport, and communications generally.

There will be a ministry of trade in staple products and for the conservation and development of the natural resources of the earth.

There will be a ministry of social and labour conditions.

There will be a ministry of world health.

There will be a ministry—the most important ministry of all, — watching and supplementing national educational work and taking up the care and stimulation of backward communities.

And instead of a War Office and Naval and Military departments, there will be a *Peace Ministry* studying the belligerent possibilities of every new invention, watching for armed disturbances everywhere, and having complete control of every armed force that remains in the world.

The government of the world-state will be comparatively simple. There will be no foreign enemy, no foreign competition, no foreign tariffs. But how is the world-state to be created ?

There must be a new universal scheme of education, emphasising human unity, and for this education the world needs a book, a new Bible, carrying out, on far more elaborate lines, the idea that inspired Mr Wells when he wrote his *Outline of History*. The new Bible of Civilisation must be modelled on the old Bible.

I am taking the Bible as my model. I am taking it because twice in history—first as the Old Testament, and then again as the Old and New Testament together—it has formed a culture, and unified and kept together through many generations great masses of people. . . .

Nevertheless, I hope I shall not offend any

reader if I point out that the Bible is not all we need to-day, and that also in some respects it is redundant. Its very virtues created its limitations. It served men so well that they made a Canon of it and refused to alter it further. Throughout the most vital phases of Hebrew history, throughout the most living years of Christian development, the Bible changed and grew. Then its growth ceased and its text became fixed. But the world went on growing and discovering new needs and new necessities. . . .

This new Bible must give men a general history of mankind, " the flaming beginnings of our world, the vast ages of its making, and the astounding unfolding in age after age of life." Then it must tell a universal history of man, emphasising the common development and the intimate relations of the various races. Then it must provide Rules of Life, Rules of Health, Rules of Conduct. The Rules of Conduct will particularly apply to modern conditions, and from them solutions will be found of the industrial conflicts that at present trouble the world.

If we could so moralise the use of property, if we could arrive at a clear idea of just what use an owner could make of his machinery, or a financier could make of his credit, would there be much left of the incessant labour conflicts of the present time ? For if you will look into it, you will find there is hardly ever a labour conflict into which some unsettled question of principle, some unsettled question

of the permissible use of property, does not enter as the final and essential dispute.

Pure literature will be included in Wells's Bible, and his selection is rather curious—no plays and no novels, no long poems, but well-selected anthologies to be called "The Book of Freedom," "The Book of Justice," "The Book of Charity," and so on. The scheme of the Wells Bible is certainly grandiose. It will probably never be carried out. Wells himself asserts that "a common book, a book of knowledge and wisdom, is the necessary foundation for any enduring human unanimity," but if the book is never actually put together, the idea suggests the insistent necessity for a new idea of education for which Wells pleads in the last two chapters of *The Salvaging of Civilisation.*

The world must develop a better intelligence and a better heart, and this is hopeless unless the world has better schools and a better system of education. This summary of Wells's last polemical work shows him in almost the same mood as he was in twenty years ago. He is still preaching salvation by education, and as far as this book is concerned he has almost forgotten the Invisible King, without whose help he has insisted there can be no salvation. Indeed almost the only reference to God in *The Salvaging of Civilisation* is in the paragraph in which Wells says:

"The linking reality of the world-state is much more likely to be not an individual but an idea—such an idea as that of the human commonweal under the God of all mankind."

The letters from the Washington Conference, published under the title of *Washington and the Hope of Peace*, are a repetition of warning and a reaffirmation of faith. "The catastrophe of 1914 is still going on. . . . The breakdown is a real decay that spreads and spreads. . . . The world's economic life, its civilisation, embodied in its great towns is disintegrating and collapsing to the strains of the modern war-threat and of the disunited control of modern affairs. . . . War can only be made impossible when the powers of the world have done what the thirteen original States of the American Union found they had to do after their independence was won for them—and that is, set up a common law and rule over themselves."

There is repeated protest against the particularism which characterised the Washington Conference and is making international amity impossible. Wells protests against the boycotting of Germany, since if Germany is ruined most of Europe will be ruined, and also because Germany has ceased for ever to be military. He protests against the boycotting of Russia, mainly because of the great

service of the Russian armies to the Allies in the early days of the war. "The debt of gratitude Britain and France owe to Russia's unknown warrior, that poor unhonoured hero and martyr, is incalculable."

The famous criticisms of France were inspired by the fact that in Wells's opinion the present policy of the French Government is driving his world-state farther away into the mists of the future. Washington sometimes filled him with hope and sometimes filled him with disappointment. But he left the Conference with a really fine profession of faith.

> I know that I believe so firmly in this great world at peace that lies so close to our own, ready to come into being as our wills turn towards it, that I must needs go about this present world of disorder and darkness like an exile doing such feeble things as I can towards the world of my desire, now hopefully, now bitterly, as the moods may happen until I die.

The note of hopefulness is struck with splendid emphasis in at least two places in these letters. One is the assertion: "There is no real necessity about either mental or physical miserableness in human life." The other is:

> Every other gossip tells you that President Harding comes from Main Street and repeats the story of Mrs Harding saying: "We're just folk." If President Harding is a fair sample of Main Street,

Sinclair Lewis has not told us the full story, and Main Street is destined to save the world.

That is indeed the simplest and most profound of all truths. If the world is ever to be saved, the job will have to be done by the people who are "just folk." The wise and the wealthy, the ambitious and the highly-placed, have had a long inning and a precious mess they have made of things. If the simple men of the world could meet together in an international conference—not the pushing politicians or the doctrinaire reformers or the busy little bureaucrats: but the men, content with their homes and their gardens and their families and their books, who live on good terms with their neighbour and covet none of his goods, who rejoice in good fellowship, and in friendship, and are pleased with simple pleasures—if these men, who are to be found in every country in the world, could sit together at Versailles or Washington, at Cannes or Genoa, they would speedily find a way of avoiding silly quarrels, and cruel wars, and a means of ensuring peace on earth and good-will among men.

CHAPTER TEN

The text of *The Outline of History* is that "there can be no common peace and prosperity without common historical ideas." Purely nationalist traditions must be supplanted by the idea that history is "the common adventure of all mankind."

In the past, the Bible supplied the account of this common adventure. The men of all nations are the children of Adam. The incidents in the history of a small Asiatic people are presented as of immense significance to the rest of the world. And an ethical system is elaborated for the benefit of the whole of humanity. While, therefore, the term "history" has generally meant for most people merely the history of their own country, the Bible has supplied a history which all the Western peoples to some extent regarded as their own, so long as the world was ready to believe the mystical story of creation and of the fall of man.

When the scientist proved (or, as I person-

ally prefer to say, professed to prove) that man first appeared on earth not as the result of a special creation but as the last achievement of a long evolutionary development, the significance of the Bible as universal history was materially lessened. Its stories were rejected as fact and merely regarded as allegory.

Wells determined to write a book which should fill completely the place that the Bible used to fill partially. The Bible begins with the creation of man. Wells decided to begin a universal history before the creation of man.

The Outline of History is a long book, but it is, in effect, a very brief telling of a very long story. It begins with the first appearance of any sort of life on the planet, possibly six hundred million years ago, and finishes with the first meeting of the League of Nations at Geneva in 1920.

Even Hilaire Belloc admits that, in the early chapters, in which he describes the Making of Man, Wells is eminently fair. He is careful to admit the uncertainties, to admit that certain statements are only guesses, to use the word "probably" over and over again.

I confess that I am one of those people who are not quite convinced by the truth of the story of evolution as Wells tells it with admirable clearness in his *Outline*. Of course it may all be true. On the other hand, it may not.

The links in the chain are unquestionably often what Hilaire Belloc calls " rusty scraps which may or may not be links."

Wells is strikingly honest, but all through the story there is, to me, an obvious attempt (and in this Wells is only following the example of all the evolutionists) to produce evidence to prove a preconceived theory rather than to let the evidence, scanty as it may be, speak for itself.

The fact of the matter is that we really know nothing of what happened on the earth forty thousand years ago. We know practically nothing of what happened before the beginning of recorded history. To take one example, ever since the first records the Mediterranean Sea has been exactly as it is to-day. Wells says that " it is practically certain that at the end of the last glacial age the Mediterranean was a couple of land-locked sea basins." I cannot for the life of me appreciate the evidence that justifies this assertion, and it seems to me that Belloc is perfectly right in his comment that the whole thing is guess-work—very fascinating and ingenious guess-work, very suggestive and exciting, but guess-work for all that.

The importance of the early chapters in the scheme of the book is that they supply the whole human race with a common ancestry.

There is a picture in chapter ten of a gentleman called the " Cro-magnon Man "—the first true man to walk on the earth. He and his fellows were, we are told, the ancestors of the modern man. Personally I should prefer to believe that I was descended from Adam. The idea is more picturesque. Wells feels the same necessity for supplying us with a common ancestor as the poet who wrote the first chapter of Genesis felt. Wells, the scientist, has supplied Wells the artist with his facts which are set out with such skill and simplicity that even the common wayfaring man can understand and is interested even when he is not convinced. It is admitted that we have a common ancestor, anyhow, whether he be Adam or the Cro-magnon.

It is not my purpose to attempt any sort of summary of the *Outline*. Everything in this one book can be found, perhaps, in a thousand different books. All I am attempting to do is to point out its significance, to try and discover the object with which it was written. The first evident object is to give us a popular up-to-date version of the first book of Genesis, less poetic, much longer, but hardly less interesting.

The average historian—particularly the retail dealer in historical facts — is never so happy as when he can kill romance and when

he thinks he can prove that romantic stories are not true. These people have the same curiously unpleasant joy in demonstrating that William Tell never shot an arrow through an apple on his son's head as they have in asserting that Joan of Arc never heard mystical voices urging her to her great mission.

Wells is a scientist and a terrible fellow for evolution, but he is poet enough to understand that the history of man must be romantic since man himself is a creature of fantastic romance. Referring to the Trojan wars, he sneers quite properly at the " modern writers, with modern ideas in their heads," who " have tried to make out that the Greeks assailed Troy in order to secure a trade route"; and he declares that " the Homeric Greeks were a healthy, barbaric Aryan people, with very poor ideas about trade and trade routes; they went to war with the Trojans because they were thoroughly annoyed about the stealing of women."

As soon as men began to build cities they began to build temples. Religion has been a vital part of civilisation since its beginning. Wells stresses this point, and this is natural since his discovery that without religion and the vivifying power of religion civilisation must come to an end. The temple was first

of all a place of worship, but the temple festivals kept count of time. The priests were doctors and recorders and the temple was the home of what knowledge there was in the world. The power of the secular king was a later creation than the power of the priests.

Very early in the history of civilisation, men were differentiated into classes, trade and usury came into existence, and a strong-minded minority in each community began to batten on the labour of the less energetic and the less competent majority. The social evils, which Wells deplores, have had, as he shows, a very long history. They have existed practically as long as civilisation itself.

Wells is emphatic in his testimony to the debt that mankind owes to the Jews. Jehovah may have started merely as a tribal deity, but the Hebrew prophets dreamed of " one God in all the world."

> From this time onward there runs through human thought, now weakly and obscurely, now gathering power, the idea of one rule in the world, and of a promise and possibility of an active and splendid peace and of happiness in human affairs.

If from the Hebrew prophets comes the idea of one God, linking the races of men together in a common faith, from the Greek philosophers comes the inspiration to inquire, to wonder. " Never before had man challenged

his world and the way of life to which he found his birth had brought him. Never had he said before that he could alter his condition."

The Greek was the father of science, and, as such, Wells, the scientist, regards him with veneration. The Hebrew was the father of religion; and the world-state, Wells's heaven on earth, must be created, if it is ever to be created, by the alliance of science and religion.

The world-state has its prototype in the Roman Empire which, at its zenith, embraced practically the whole of Western civilisation and in which every free citizen, whether he were a Jew or a Gaul, a Briton or a North African, was a Roman citizen. Athens had anticipated Roman cosmopolitanism. The foreigner was treated in Athens exactly like a native. But Athens remained a city while the city of Rome became the centre of an Empire, within which there was but one law and no wars.

Hilaire Belloc contends that the Roman Empire was never absolutely destroyed. Wells says that "the smashing of the Roman social and political structure was complete."

The Church was to some extent the heir of the Empire. As it gradually extended its sway all over Europe it created a link between the nations, and this universal Church was the constant protector of the poor against the

tyranny of princes and barons. But the Church never had the power of the Empire. Within the boundaries of the Empire there was constant peace. Within the boundaries of the nations calling themselves Christian and subject to the spiritual authority of Rome there was never-ending war.

Wells's story of the rise of Christianity is again characteristic. To him Jesus Christ is "a being, very human, very earnest and passionate, capable of swift anger . . . a person—to use a common phrase—of intense personal magnetism." His teaching struck at patriotism and at the bonds of family loyalty, and "condemned all the gradations of the economic system, all private wealth and personal advancement." His teaching, so Wells says, was political as well as moral, and Wells adds that the most important historical aspect of His gospel is that it is practically identical with the teaching of Buddha and of the founders of the other great world-religions.

St Paul, a man of subtle intellect and considerable education (Sir Gilbert Murray says that his Greek was extremely good), turned the doctrine of Jesus into a theological system, which was further developed in the first four centuries and was codified at the famous General Council at Nicæa.

Thanks to Constantine, Christianity became

the official religion of the Roman Empire, and in the centuries that followed the Barbarian races also became Christian. But Wells says: "The history of Europe from the fifth century onward to the fifteenth is very largely of the failure of this great idea of a Divine World Government to realise itself in practice."

It is necessary to note here the rather important fact that Wells ignores the fact that the Christian Church was built round the Mystery of the Eucharist, and that in all the turmoils of the centuries this Mystery has been its great possession. To ignore this fact is obviously to be judging and estimating the Church from the outside and possibly to be blaming it for what it has never professed to be.

To Wells the Dark Ages are very dark. Christianity, he tells us, was entirely corrupted in the seventh century when it was pitted against the new religion taught by Mohammed. In Wells's view Mohammed was an "evidently lustful and rather shifty leader . . . vain, egotistical, tyrannous, and a self-deceiver," not for a minute to be compared with Jesus of Nazareth. But "it is not always through sublime persons that great things come into human life." The strength of Moslemism is that it is a simple and understandable religion. It has no theological elaborations, no sacrificial priesthood. Without ambiguous sym-

bolism it preached the existence of a God of righteousness with whose aid there might be created " a great and increasing brotherhood of trustworthy men on earth."

From these quotations it will be seen that there are many points of resemblance between the religion of Mohammed as set out in the Koran and the religion of H. G. Wells as set out in *God the Invisible King*.

Perhaps the most valuable characteristic of *The Outline of History* is the persistent endeavour to explain the links that have existed between the various peoples of the world in every era of its history. It is a matter of common knowledge that during the Dark Ages Greek culture travelled eastward, that it reached the Arabs through the Syrians and the Persians, that it was brought westward to Spain by the Arabs and the Moors, and that from Spain it travelled to Northern Italy where Saint Thomas Aquinas read Aristotle with the help of Arab commentators. But the Arabs also brought westward many things that they had learned from the Indians and the Chinese, including the manufacture of paper. It would have been no use Gutenberg inventing the art of printing if there had been no paper to print on, and it is interesting to know that Europe owed her paper to Eastern ingenuity and successful Moslem conquest.

Without the Chinese and their paper there could have been no revival of learning in Europe.

Wells realises the enormous historical importance of the First Crusade, if one regards history as the story of the human race rather than the mere record of the achievements of the outstanding men of each generation. He says perfectly truly that in the First Crusade " we discover for the first time Europe with an idea and a soul." I think he underestimates the part played in the Crusade by Peter the Hermit.

He says that Urban II., the French Pope, preached his famous sermon at Clermont after receiving an appeal for help against the Moslems from the Greek Emperor at Constantinople. It is at least probable, however, that Peter the Hermit had an audience of the Pope on his way back from his pilgrimage to the Holy Land, and that he recounted to him the persecution which Christian pilgrims suffered at the hands of the Saracens, and that it was Peter that inspired the Clermont sermon.

The great dramatic interest of the First Crusade is that it was a popular movement. Peter the Hermit preached vehement sermons in France and Germany, and common men left their homes and their work in the fields and the city workshops, and started to trudge

across Europe on a fantastic but inspiring mission. These common men had little to do with the success of the Crusade. That, for what it was worth, was achieved by Godfrey de Bouillon and his noble associates. But their apparently futile sacrifice was a magnificent demonstration (a demonstration of immense interest to Wells's peculiar view of history) that the masses of men can never be stirred to enthusiasm except by some idea that is at once unselfish and fantastic. Another point of vast importance about the Crusades is that it was a European movement, and that while the Crusades lasted all war among Christians ceased.

Rather oddly, Wells does not emphasise the obvious fact that the Reformation destroyed the unity of the Western world. Whatever good things the Reformation may have brought with it, it took away the one binding link between the European peoples — their common submission to the spiritual power of Rome.

In so far, too, as the Reformation was official, as it was in England and Germany, and the local Prince replaced the Pope as the head of the local church, the Reformation was definitely reactionary. Wells quotes Mr Ernest Barker, who points out that the Catholic and the Calvinist were both democratic,

while the Lutheran and the Anglican were both monarchic and aristocratic.

The great intellectual activity of the Renaissance was accompanied by a "definite drift towards Machiavellian monarchy," towards separatism and autocratic power. Something like Wells's world-state had existed so long as the Roman Empire endured. The scheme of a world-state was in existence so long as the whole of Europe lived in submission to the Pope. With the Renaissance and the Reformation and the consequent fundamental religious and national differences came the beginning of the Great Powers, the scramble for overseas Empire, perpetual quarrels between princes and peoples, almost ceaseless war, and the entire loss for the time of the international idea.

Looking at history from the point of view of this statement, it may be said that the historical epoch that began with the Reformation certainly lasted until the Great War, and that there is very little reason to hope that it has yet come to an end.

I imagine that the happiness of the common people during the Middle Ages has been considerably exaggerated by enthusiastic mediævalists like William Morris. Wells says that in England the poorer sort of man was leading an endurable existence until the beginning of

the eighteenth century. The destruction of the Monasteries, Vagrancy Acts, and the stealing of the common land had all added to the hardship of life for the poor in England, while on the Continent the farmer of taxes made life terribly hard. But while, from the Reformation till the end of the eighteenth century, the governing minority was not in the least concerned with the happiness of the toiling majority, life for the majority did not become sordid and hideous until the beginning of the Industrial Revolution.

Our modern world was born with the beginning of industrialism, the creation of the American Republic, and the French Revolution. Industrialism compelled the majority to become what Socialists call wage-slaves. The United States has been for over a century an object-lesson to the world of a great nation covering a continent, made up of men of practically all races, developing a vehement patriotism without king or aristocracy, and offering (unhappily with some reservation) equal opportunities to all its citizens.

The French Revolution, founded on the Rights of Man, was international. In the first enthusiasm of the Revolution any man who loved freedom was accepted as a French citizen, and this international tradition was inherited by Karl Marx and now is a char-

acteristic of the Labour and Socialist movement.

As Wells points out, the difference between wage-earners steadily decreased during the nineteenth century and " a sense of solidarity between all sorts of poor and propertyless men, as against the profit-amassing and wealth-concentrated class, is growing more and more evident in our world." The solidarity is not yet, however, really international.

The fall of Napoleon was followed by another hundred years of great Powers intriguing each other, and these intrigues finally led to the holocaust of the Great War.

Wells's attitude to the great men of history is extremely interesting. For example :—

> There was in Alexander the Great knowledge and imagination, power and opportunity, folly, egotism, detestable vulgarity, and an immense promise broken by the accident of early death.
>
> Cæsar's record of vulgar schemingfor the tawdriest mockeries of personal worship is a silly and shameful record ; it is incompatible with the idea that he was a wise and wonderful superman setting the world to rights.
>
> The figure he (Napoleon) makes in history is one of almost incredible self-conceit, of vanity, greed, and cunning, of callous contempt and disregard of all who trusted him, and of a grandiose apeing of Cæsar, Alexander, and Charlemagne which would be purely comic if it were not caked over with human blood.

Wells's view of Cæsar and Napoleon seems to me partial and wrong. I have already attempted in another place and at some length to controvert his picture of Napoleon, but the prejudice that inspires the caricature is a vital part of the man. To Wells, the autocrat and the great conqueror have invariably contrived misery for the mass of the people. They have waged unnecessary wars. They have caused unnecessary death, they have been responsible for unnecessary sorrow. It is ridiculous for one man to have the power of life and death over hundreds of thousands of other men. It is unsafe. It must lead to disaster. The autocratic institution is intensely foolish and is certain to lead to the waste that Wells hates from the bottom of his soul.

It is difficult for him to conceive a good autocrat, and he seems unable to appreciate the extraordinary qualities both of intellect and character that made it possible for a man like Napoleon, born of the humblest parentage, to make himself the master of the Western world. He almost entirely ignores the good that Napoleon did for Europe. He criticises the Code Napoleon and suggests that Napoleon himself had very little to do with drawing it up. He practically ignores the fact that, before the Revolution, there was no real law in France to which the poor man could appeal;

that, during the Revolution, there was a hectic enthusiasm for law-making with a resultant confusion and uncertainty; and that the Code Napoleon for the first time gave one law to the whole of France, and thus gave the people a measure of security and justice.

Wells does not seem to realise the part that the superman sometimes plays in the progress of the race. If Cromwell was the Hammer of the Lord, Napoleon was the Hammer of the Revolution. The soldiers of the Napoleonic armies carried the principles of the Revolution into all the countries that they invaded, and, nearly everywhere, the invasions meant the end of Feudalism.

I do not ignore the evil that the great man has often wrought. I am as suspicious as Wells of all dictators, whether they are hereditary or whether they have gained their places by successful political intrigue. But it is idle to ignore the fact that great place cannot be won without great qualities, and that at certain crises in the world's history the one great man —often entirely selfish and unscrupulous— may, without the least intention, be of incalculable value in the human pilgrimage towards happiness.

At the end of *The Outline of History* Wells is once more optimistic. He finds a new sanity in the world. " Brotherhood through

sorrow, sorrow for common sufferings and for irreparable mutual injuries, is spreading and increasing throughout the world." The ordinary man will, I fear, find little evidence of the growth of this brotherhood.

Our true nationality, says Wells, is mankind, but the war has served to accentuate the fierceness of parochial nationality. Never were Frenchmen more fiercely French. Never were Germans more determinedly German. New nationalities and new patriotisms have been added to the welter. The Yugo-Slav can now for the first time be fiercely Yugo-Slavic, while the Irish have successfully worked out the policy summarised in their motto—"Ourselves Alone."

It is true that the next war, if it ever occurs, will bring with it almost unthinkable horrors. Wells is perfectly right continually to insist on this fact. It is true that the common people in every country would be horrified if they heard that another great war had commenced. But in no country in the world have the common people any real power to decide whether there shall be peace or war, and in nearly every country in the world statesmen still pursue the narrow-visioned nationalistic policy which made the last war and must, if it be obstinately pursued, make another.

It is true too that the Great War has left

Europe bankrupt, that the standard of comfort has fallen, that unemployment is chronic, that the credit of the most prosperous powers is in peril.

The amazing thing is that this condition of affairs is accepted with comparative indifference. Statesmen make warning speeches. International conferences are held almost every month, but nothing fundamental is ever done. No one has courage enough to suggest the revolutionary changes that are obviously necessary if worse ill is not to befall the world. There is not the smallest sign that either kings or statesmen or parliaments or peoples have really grasped the Wells idea that Western civilisation must be destroyed without the creation of a world order and one universal law of justice.

It is clear to me that little can be expected during the present generation. The best that one can hope is that the world has become too impoverished to make another war possible for at least another fifty years. By that time education may have done its work, and it will have the better chance of contriving salvation the more Wells's *Outline of History* is put into the hands of the young.

Hilaire Belloc refers to the *Outline* as " not an example of great weight nor likely to endure for long." This is the voice of prejudice.

The *Outline* is an amazing achievement, the work of a great and courageous writer inspired with a high ideal and equipped with amazing knowledge.

Human history, Wells says, becomes more and more a race between education and catastrophe. He admits that catastrophe has sometimes won. It seems to me that catastrophe has nearly always won. Education had its day in Greece, and the power of the Greek cities passed away into semi-barbarism. The Roman Empire educated the peoples of Europe in unity and respect for the law, and the Roman Empire was destroyed. The Christian Church offered the peoples a mystic unity, and the peoples rejected it. The story of the nineteenth century is one long story of growing prosperity and increasing knowledge, and the story ended with the Great War. Great indeed must be the faith of the man fully conscious of all the failures who can finish his *Outline* with this great profession :—

> Gathered together at last under the leadership of man, the student teacher of the universe, unified, disciplined, armed with secret powers of the atom and with knowledge as yet beyond dreaming, Life, for ever dying to be born afresh, for ever young and eager, will presently stand upon this earth as upon a footstool and stretch out its realm amidst the stars.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

" I WOULD rather be called a journalist than an artist." This admission has occurred over and over again in my mind as I have been writing this book. It may happen (heaven forbid that I should say that it has often happened) that a man may be both a journalist and a literary artist. But in this confession written by Wells to Henry James he was deliberately, and I think truthfully, " placing " himself. A journalist is necessarily closely in touch with the mind of his own day. He feels the changes of atmosphere. He is acutely affected by his fellows.

Mr H. L. Mencken says: " He (Wells) seems to respond to all the varying crazes and fallacies of the day ; he swallows them without digesting them ; he tries to substitute mere timeliness for reflection and feeling." The most cursory study of Wells's books is a sufficient refutation of Mr Mencken's criticism. Wells certainly has responded to the intellectual movements of his age, possibly to its

crazes and fallacies, if Socialism be regarded as a craze and the possibility of perpetual peace a fallacy. It may perhaps be said too that Wells swallowed Fabian Socialism. He most certainly was unable to digest it. One might continue the imagery to its coarse conclusion. Further thought and examination caused him to reject the Socialist theory of social betterment so far as it implied bureaucratic interference with individual liberty. But, as I have shown, this phase, like every other phase of Wells's experience, has been part of a sane and logical progression.

The charge that he has substituted " mere timeliness for reflection and feeling " is eminently unfair. Wells has the journalistic faculty for being up-to-date, for dealing with actual problems and actual social conditions. But it is impossible to read *Love and Mr Lewisham* and then to say that the book was written by a man who has never considered the consequences of indifferent education and foolish early marriages; it is impossible to read *Tono Bungay* and then to assert that its author has not fully considered, from his own point of view, the social effects of existing commercial conditions; it is impossible to read *The New Machiavelli* without being impressed by the fact that its author has very carefully and very honestly con-

sidered the eternal problem of the human triangle ; it is impossible to read *Mr Britling Sees It Through* without realising that the book is the work of a man of acute intelligence and feeling carefully recording the impressions made on his own mind and soul by the events of the war ; it is impossible, whatever may be one's own opinions, to read *God the Invisible King* without being impressed by its sincerity and its individual honesty.

In one respect, Mr Mencken is quite right. It has never been enough for Wells " to display the life of his time with accuracy and understanding." He has always been eager to set things right. That may be, as Mr Mencken says, " a fatuous yearning," a sinister impulse, " as aberrant in an artist as a taste for legs in an Archbishop." But it is the impulse that has always been there. Wells has never made the smallest attempt to hide it. From the beginning he has had a gospel to preach, and he has always been determined to preach it. He is not in the least upset by the charge that he has gone outside " the business of an artist." He does not ask to be regarded as an artist. If he be an artist, as even Mr Mencken admits he is in the best of his novels, then he is an artist *malgré lui.* In this he is unique among great writers. Nine-tenths of the writers of fine fiction would, I suppose,

agree with Henry James's statement: "I hold that interest may be, *must* be, exquisitely made and created."

Wells does not create his interest by mere stridency in the manner of the writer of newspaper head-lines. He creates it by sheer power. He writes emphatically, simply, intensely. There is no conscious attempt to reach beauty or exquisiteness.

Wells is unquestionably what Mr Mencken has called him, and as I have tried to show him, "a true proletarian." Mr Mencken has nothing but scorn for the proletarian—an unlucky creature "born with morals, faiths, certainties, vasty gaseous hopes." But perhaps morals and faiths and certainties are not altogether undesirable possessions, and it may be better for a man to have gaseous hope than no hope at all.

Anyway, Wells has all these things. He certainly believes that a novel, like every other human achievement, must have a moral significance. He has always been a man of faith, though his faith has developed with the years and has suffered fundamental change. He clings to the certainty of the ultimate creation of a finer and happier human society, despite all the discouraging phenomena of his own day.

This is the finest of all his characteristics. He realises clearly enough the obstinate con-

tinuance of inefficiency and folly. He realises, perhaps more clearly than any other living man, the ultimate destruction that must occur if inefficiency and folly are not destroyed. Yet he looks ahead and still has hope, " vasty gaseous hope," if Mr Mencken prefers it.

It has been well said that Wells simply does not know how to be dull. Even at his worst he is readable, and this is a genuine tribute to the fascination of his personality, because he has constantly repeated himself, and it is only from the most talented that we are content to listen to the old, old story.

Wells is amazingly prolific, and, apart altogether from his scorn of art for art's sake, he has obviously written far too much to write conspicuously well. He is always in a hurry, as a journalist must be. The leading article *à propos* on Tuesday is out of date on Wednesday. Wells has the same feeling about his books. A book, suggested by the situation existing this year, will be dated next year, will cease to have its value as a human document if it is not produced amid the circumstances that have suggested it to the author's mind. " Do it now " might well be the Wells family motto.

The fact that Wells is a combination of scientist, reformer, and artist despite himself, sometimes leads to curious results. He is a

born story-teller, and now and again he has broken away from the realism of a novel for the sake of telling a fantastic yarn. The most striking instance of this is the concluding part of *Marriage*, in which, for entirely insufficient reasons, he sends Trafford and Marjorie off to Labrador. Another example is the irrelevant search for " quap " in *Tono Bungay*.

These breakaways are the inevitable result of versatility. Only a man capable of the most severe self-discipline can prevent himself from doing everything that he feels he can do well. It sometimes seems to me that Wells gets a little bored before he gets to the end of a long book. His masterpiece, *The History of Mr Polly*, is very short, but it must be added in justice that his longest work, *The Outline of History*, is written with red-hot enthusiasm from the first page to the last. But in the last chapters of *Tono Bungay* there is a definite suggestion that the author is growing tired and that he is looking forward eagerly to writing the last paragraph. And after reading *Marriage* one feels that two-thirds through the book Wells must have said to himself: " I have written about this husband and wife business before, the whole thing is growing terribly tiresome; suppose I finish the book with a rattling adventure, dropping the philosopher for the time and showing that I

can beat Conan Doyle at his own game!" And he did.

In their series of essays, *Some Modern Novelists*, Helen Thomas Follett and Wilson Follet say of Wells: "The net result of his writings must be, we should think, to set the individual reader to examining his own heart, scouring his own motives, and sparing insincerity in himself no more than he spares it in his neighbours; setting a standard for his moral life and then living toward it even at some cost to his bodily comfort and with some sacrifice of the approval of others." I do not know whether the Wells writings do actually have this effect. I fear that it is unlikely. But it is certain that they are intended to have this effect. They are intended as an incitement to service, and there can be no service without a certain measure of sacrifice.

The call to the individual has become louder and more insistent as book has succeeded book. In Wells's early writings it is society that is arraigned. Society is responsible for waste and avoidable unhappiness. Then Wells gradually began to realise that there can be no fundamental improvement in society without fundamental changes in the individuals who make up society. Mr Polly is the victim of inane social conditions, but after fifteen years' submission Mr Polly finds the courage

to fight against social conditions. He experiences a change of heart. He is converted from a slave to a rebel, and the consequence is that he is able to find for himself happiness and content.

Then the perplexing problem had to be faced as to how any sort of a general conversion can be brought about, how not one odd individual but the mass of men can find the courage to fight life and to gain satisfaction. The consideration of this problem compelled Wells to the conviction of the existence of God, his God of the Human Heart, without whom there can be not only no victory, but not even a fight. So the Wells faith gradually evolved.

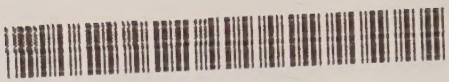
Given a sufficient number of men conscious of the inspiration and assistance of God, the old order with its cruelty and its futility and its waste may be destroyed and all things may be made new. But God helps those who help themselves. The world-state can only be reached by education, by truer and fuller knowledge, by a new basis of thought which will overthrow parochial and national boundaries and will regard mankind as a whole, equally the children of God, equally the heirs of His Kingdom.

It is easy to sneer at the Wells gospel as fatuous. It may well be that it is inferior to the old gospels. I am certainly not inclined

to discuss its intrinsic value. I have merely endeavoured to summarise and explain its tenets. The point of outstanding interest and importance is that this little volcano of a man, with the strength and the limitations of his class, its amazing and sometimes coarse candour, its sentimentality and its morals, this man who has been described as the greatest intellectual force in the English-speaking world, should have given the best years of his life to preaching a gospel at all and should have insisted on the necessity for men to be mystically guided and inspired.

When Mr Wells found God, the age of materialism definitely came to an end.

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY NEILL AND CO., LTD., EDINBURGH.



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